
OFFICIAL REPORT

(HANSARD)

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NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Friday 10 July 2009

Written Answers to Questions

OFFICE OF THE FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER

Members of the European Parliament

Mr S Gardiner asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline their plans to create a more structured relationship with Northern Ireland's three Members of the European Parliament. (AQW 8350/09)

First Minister and deputy First Minister (Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness): The Executive's office in Brussels had a good working relationship with our MEPs under the last mandate and we would expect that relationship to continue. The issue of MEP engagement is currently under review. Officials plan to meet each of the MEPs in the near future and will take their views on the need for a more structured relationship.

Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Strategy

Mrs D Kelly asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, in light of the recent racist attacks and incidents in South Belfast, when the Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Strategy will be published. (AQW 8475/09)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: We are appalled by the deplorable racist attacks on Romanian families in the South and East Belfast areas within the past two weeks, and indeed other recent racist and sectarian attacks.

These are unacceptable acts on men, women and young children who came here to build a new future for themselves. This incident has done major damage to our reputation and our efforts to build a shared and better future for everyone.

We have consistently stated that migrant workers are bringing very real benefits both to our society and our economy. We welcome and support those who have come to live and work here and we utterly condemn hate crime and discrimination of any kind.

It must be remembered that these are the actions of a few; most people were appalled, and many acted to support these families.

A range of groups we fund in Belfast, and local community representatives, are working to prevent more attacks of this kind and to support the unfortunate victims.

We are fully committed to building a cohesive, shared and integrated society for all. We want to ensure that newcomers to our shores are welcomed into communities which are not divided, separate or unequal, whilst at the same time addressing the challenges that face new and host communities.

We are on record as stating that we are finalising proposals for a draft Programme of Cohesion, Sharing and Integration. That Programme must, and will, tackle the challenges which local communities are facing. It will set a framework to confront racism, sectarianism and other prejudices.

We hear the calls for us to conclude the preparation of our policy proposals. We are hopeful that work on this is nearing completion.

However, we also recognise that a framework alone is not enough. It requires the efforts of us all to stand up to reject the behaviours and prejudices which underpin these actions.

We can reassure communities, particularly the most vulnerable, that whilst we liaise with the Assembly Committee, the work of challenging sectarianism, racism and all forms of intolerance is continuing with our active support.

Gender Advisory Panel

Mr P Weir asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the planned activities of the Gender Advisory Panel after 2009. (AQW 8485/09)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: It is envisaged that the planned activities of the Gender Advisory Panel after 2009 will continue to focus on implementing the 10-year Gender Equality Strategy, and preparing for the mid-term review of the strategy in 2011.

The current terms of reference for the Gender Advisory Panel are due for review in June 2009.

The next meeting of the Gender Advisory Panel is to take place on 11 September 2009. The current terms of reference stipulate that meetings shall take place several times a year and members of the advisory panel will be given two optional dates 4 weeks in advance of a meeting.

Gender Advisory Panel

Mr P Weir asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the timescales for any future activities of the Gender Advisory Panel. (AQW 8486/09)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: It is envisaged that the planned activities of the Gender Advisory Panel after 2009 will continue to focus on implementing the 10-year Gender Equality Strategy, and preparing for the mid-term review of the strategy in 2011.

The current terms of reference for the Gender Advisory Panel are due for review in June 2009.

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Gender Advisory Panel

Mr P Weir asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister the dates for future meetings of the Gender Advisory Panel. (AQW 8487/09)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: It is envisaged that the planned activities of the Gender Advisory Panel after 2009 will continue to focus on implementing the 10-year Gender Equality Strategy, and preparing for the mid-term review of the strategy in 2011.

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The next meeting of the Gender Advisory Panel is to take place on 11 September 2009. The current terms of reference stipulate that meetings shall take place several times a year and members of the advisory panel will be given two optional dates 4 weeks in advance of a meeting.

Presbyterian Mutual Society

Mr P Butler asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for details of their meeting with the Prime Minister regarding the Presbyterian Mutual Society. (AQW 8552/09)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: We met with Prime Minister Gordon Brown in London on 17 June to seek an early resolution of this situation and to bring some comfort to members of the PMS. At the meeting, Prime Minister Gordon Brown agreed to set up a working group with representatives from HM Treasury, Department of Finance and Personnel and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to reach a solution. It will be the work of this group to consider options available and to bring forward proposals

to deal with the situation facing PMS savers. We are waiting on the outcome of this group which is expected by September.

Disability Action Plans

Mr P Butler asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister which public bodies who have yet to submit disability action plans to the Equality Commission; and what steps they are taking to ensure that those bodies comply with the disability legislation. (AQW 8553/09)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: Eight public authorities have yet to submit a disability action plan: the Department for Culture, Media and Sport; the Postal Services Commission; the British Library; the Open University; Woodvale and Shankill Housing Association; the North-South language Body, (Foras Na Gaeilge and the Ulster Scots Agency); Newtownabbey District Policing Partnership; and the Public Prosecution Service. The Commission is continuing to correspond with and assist those public authorities that have yet to submit a disability action plan.

Peace III Funding

Mr P Weir asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, under Peace III funding, at what stage is each of the Council Clusters. (AQW 8584/09)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister does not hold this information. We suggest that you direct your inquiry to the Special EU Programmes Body.

Peace III Funding

Mr P Weir asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail which Council Clusters have issued letters of offer to groups for funding under Peace III. (AQW 8591/09)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister does not hold any information on Letters of Offer issued to groups for PEACE III funding by Council Clusters.

We suggest that you direct your inquiry to the Special EU Programmes Body.

Performance Management Process

Mr P McGlone asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail any Ministerial input to the assessment by the Head of the Civil Service on the performance of Permanent Secretaries in the annual performance management process; and how the results of this process are made available to the public. (AQW 8659/09)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: As part of the annual performance management process, the Head of the Civil Service meets with each Minister to take their views on the performance of the Permanent Secretary in their respective Departments.

Information relating to an individual's performance assessment is considered personal information under the Data Protection Act and therefore it would be a breach of the Act to disclose this publicly.

Strategic Investment Board

Mr D Kennedy asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister which branch of Government is responsible for (i) Strategic Investment Board job advertisements and (ii) filling those vacancies. (AQW 8786/09)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: Strategic Investment Board Limited supports the Executive in delivering its investment programme. In fulfilling that role on behalf of the Executive and Departments, responsibility for Strategic Investment Board job advertisements and filling those vacancies rests with Strategic Investment Board Limited.

Strategic Investment Board

Mr D Kennedy asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what role their Department has in the Strategic Investment Board's development of Lisanelly, Omagh. (AQW 8787/09)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister does not have a direct role in the development of Lisanelly, Omagh as this is a Department of Education project.

Strategic Investment Board Limited, which is owned by the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, is providing input to the development of Lisanelly on behalf of and in support of the Department of Education. This is in line with its role in supporting the Executive in delivering its investment programme.

Strategic Investment Board

Mr D Kennedy asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister under which guidelines do Strategic Investment Board job advertisements fall. (AQW 8788/09)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: Strategic Investment Board Limited conforms to the legislation on equality of opportunity in relation to the placement of job advertisements.

Strategic Investment Board Limited supports the Executive in delivering its investment programme. In the event that a Strategic Investment Board job advertisement is required to support a Department-led project, Strategic Investment Board Limited may advertise a post under the Department's logo and in line with that Department's guidelines in relation to job advertisements.

Executive Meeting

Mr D Kennedy asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister on what date and at what time, to the nearest five minute interval, was the final agenda for the Executive meeting of 25 June 2009 (i) agreed; and (ii) circulated to Ministers. (AQW 8840/09)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: It is not our practice to disclose details of Executive business. The content of Executive papers and all aspects of Executive business are confidential.

June Monitoring Round Statement

Mr D Kennedy asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister on what date and at what time, to the nearest five minute interval, was the June monitoring round statement from the Minister of Finance and Personnel (i) passed to OFMDFM; (ii) approved by OFMDFM; and (iii) circulated to Ministers. (AQW 8841/09)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: It is not our practice to disclose details of Executive business. The content of Executive papers and all aspects of Executive business are confidential.

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Hedge Cutting

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development why the hedge cutting season in Northern Ireland differs from that in the rest of the United Kingdom. (AQW 8530/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms M Gildernew): As part of Cross-Compliance, the north of Ireland has Good Agricultural and Environmental Conditions (GAEC's) which reflect the environmental concerns for our area. The hedge cutting dates here are the same as for Wales, whilst England and Scotland are different.

Wales	Scotland	England	NI
1 March to 31 August	1 March to 31 July	1 March to 31 July	1 March to 31 August

In the north of Ireland, song thrush, linnet and bullfinch all have active nests into August and have undergone declines of over 50% in the last 25 years, such that they are listed on British Birds of Conservation Concern and are Priority Species under the NI Biodiversity Strategy. More common and widespread species (dunnock, wren, blackbird, chaffinch and greenfinch) commonly have active nests into August or have been found nesting into August (wren, blackbird, chaffinch and greenfinch).

The Wildlife (NI) Order 1985 specifies no closed period. Nevertheless the Order gives legal protection to all wild birds in the North. Under Part 2 of the Order it is an offence to intentionally take, damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird while it is in use or being built, or take or destroy the eggs of any wild bird. By prohibiting hedge cutting between 1 March and 31 August, DARD is ensuring that farmers comply with the Wildlife Order.

Dangerous Dogs Legislation

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the review of the dangerous dogs legislation. (AQW 8539/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: My review of the dangerous dogs legislation is drawing to a close. My officials will shortly be presenting me with all the relevant evidence that has been obtained from meetings with key stakeholders, including the PSNI and District Councils, and a wide range of interested parties from here the south and Britain.

I intend to bring forward my legislative proposals to the Executive after the Summer Recess.

Draft Bee Health Strategy

Mr L Cree asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if she intends to put the draft Bee Health Strategy out for public consultation. (AQW 8541/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Yes, I intend to put the draft Bee Health Strategy out to public consultation in late 2009.

Bee Population

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what discussions she has had with relevant organisations to address the decline in the bee population and pollination. (AQW 8543/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: In the context of my attendance at the European Conference of Apidology (EurBee3) on 9 September 2008 and at the Ulster Beekeepers Association Conference on 4 March 2009, I have had informal discussions with the industry regarding the perceived decline in the bee population and pollination.

In addressing concerns raised, it is my intention to bring forward a Bee Health Strategy later in the year and as part of the development of the Strategy my officials will have discussions with all key stakeholders.

Bee Industry

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many people are currently employed in the bee industry. (AQW 8547/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: There are currently no commercial beekeepers here, the sector is exclusively hobbyist.

It is estimated that there are around 1,000 hobbyist beekeepers in the north of Ireland.

Climate Change

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the number of staff in her Department responsible for addressing issues on climate change. (AQW 8619/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Within the Department 5 members of staff have either full or partial responsibility for addressing issues on climate change.

I would add that the Department is also involved in significant operational activity relating to environmental sustainability. This relates to the Department's operational work on key priorities such as the nitrates action plan, renewable energy and the agri-environment programmes.

The Agri Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) is an executive Non Departmental Body sponsored by DARD. In addressing the research objectives of DARD, AFBI provides a sound, scientific basis for government policy on agriculture and the environment. AFBI undertakes basic, strategic and applied multidisciplinary research, relevant to achieving efficient and responsible practices in sustainable farming, food, fishing and aquaculture industries. Within AFBI 28 staff have either full or partial responsibility for addressing issues on climate change.

Climate Change

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development with which groups has she had discussions on the impact of climate change on the agricultural community. (AQW 8621/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Locally, DOE has lead responsibility for climate change, bringing cross-cutting issues to the Executive – which is already committed to cutting emissions and meeting obligations under the Climate Change Act.

I recently discussed the issue of climate change with British Minister, Hilary Benn and other devolved Ministers in Scotland and Wales. Responding to climate change will create both challenges and opportunities for the agri-food industry. I am keen to ensure that the industry plays its part in tackling the factors that contribute to climate change while allowing it to get on with the business of producing food.

My officials, and in particular the Departmental Scientific Advisor (DSA), are closely engaged with DEFRA, other devolved administrations and the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on scientific issues relevant to climate change. In recent weeks the DSA has participated in climate change meetings in Dublin, Edinburgh, London and Paris.

I have asked the DSA to examine and report to me on the current scientific knowledge relating to climate change and the implications for the agri-food industry. This will inform the development of a strategic approach by the agri-food industry to the issue.

Climate change is central to the work of the Sustainable Development Commission with whom I recently met. Also the Agricultural Stakeholder Forum on Renewable Energy, that I established last year, have examined the sector's ability to mitigate Greenhouse Gas Emissions in terms of carbon equivalents at farm and forest level. The Industry Advisory Panel, which my department has supported, is planning to examine both the pressures that are arising from the market and the policy developments and targets which will follow from the Climate Change Strategy.

Climate Change

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what contact her Department has had with the DEFRA linked agricultural group on climate change. (AQW 8622/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Locally, DOE has lead responsibility for climate change, bringing cross-cutting issues to the Executive – which is already committed to cutting emissions and meeting obligations under the Climate Change Act.

I recently discussed the issue of climate change with British Minister, Hilary Benn and other devolved Ministers in Scotland and Wales. Responding to climate change will create both challenges and opportunities for the agri-food industry. I am keen to ensure that the industry plays its part in tackling the factors that contribute to climate change while allowing it to get on with the business of producing food.

The DEFRA Rural Climate Change Forum, RCCF (chaired by John Gilliland) intends to include the Agri-food Biosciences Institute (AfBI) as part of its ongoing work on developing an evidence base for policy on mitigating greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture. The Departmental Scientific Advisor (DSA) also has significant and ongoing contact with the RCCF.

The Flood Management policy framework “Living with Rivers and the Sea” recognises the threat posed by climate change for the management of flood risk. Through the delivery of the policy framework DARD Rivers Agency will work with other Government partners, stakeholders and the public through a process of consultation and detailed policy development.

A key element of the policy framework is the implementation of the EU Floods Directive, the purpose of which is to establish a framework for the management and assessment of flood risks including the impact of climate change. As part of the process of engagement with interested parties an NI Stakeholder Group has been formed with invitations extended to a range of bodies including the UFU and NIAPA. A successful inaugural meeting of the Stakeholder Group was held on 24 June 2009.

My officials also meet regularly with their DOE and DEFRA counterparts on the development of the Climate Change Strategy and it is perhaps reassuring to note that England, Wales and Scotland also see the base of their mitigation strategies around themes such as agri-environment, protection and expansion of forestry including farm woodland, nutrient efficiency and renewable energy such as anaerobic digestion and short rotation coppice. Work to form a Climate Change Strategic Plan is a likely next step taking into account the level of annual reduction that we here in the North will need to achieve.

Climate Change

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what consultation her Department will have with DEFRA on the agricultural element of the UK’s position at the climate change conference in Copenhagen. (AQW 8624/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: International negotiations are the responsibility of Whitehall. A road map in pamphlet form has recently been issued by the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) which outlines the contribution expected of the UK as a member state.

We will also be liaising with the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (DAFF) on the southern Government’s position on carbon reduction in advance of Copenhagen.

I am keen that DECC continues to keep the devolved administrations informed of progress on this very significant issue.

Departmental Research Facility, Hillsborough

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if there are any joint projects, planned or initiated, between the departmental research facility at Hillsborough and its equivalent in Scotland. (AQW 8625/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: AFBI Hillsborough does not currently have any active or agreed joint projects with the Scottish Agricultural College (SAC) or other Scottish research institutes.

AFBI scientists are working together with SAC scientists to prepare a bid to the DEFRA Link Programme for funding for a joint project on research to underpin genetic improvement programmes for the beef sector.

Ulster Farmers’ Union and the Northern Ireland Agricultural Producers’ Association

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what discussions she has had with farming communities through the Ulster Farmers’ Union and the Northern Ireland Agricultural Producers’ Association for input on proposals she intends to bring to Brussels. (AQW 8666/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Both I and my Departmental officials meet frequently with the Ulster Farmers’ Union and the NI Agricultural Producers’ Association in a range of different fora and we will discuss, as necessary, any issues I wish to take to Brussels. A current example is the modification

of the NI Rural Development Programme (NIRDP) which is due for submission to Brussels by 15 July 2009. My Departmental officials discussed proposed amendments to the NIRDP with the Programme's Monitoring Committee in May 2009 and recently circulated a paper with further details on the content of this modification.

The Monitoring Committee includes representatives from both the Ulster Farmers' Union and the NI Agricultural Producers' Association.

I have also actively engaged with the Ulster Farmers' Union and the NI Agricultural Producers' Association on EU proposals for the electronic identification of sheep which will come into operation at the end of the year. Before meeting EU Commissioners in Brussels on Sheep Identification matters I spoke extensively to both organisations.

Imported Milk

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the amount of milk imported in (i) 2007; and (ii) 2008 from (a) England; (b) Wales; (c) Scotland; (d) Republic of Ireland; and (e) other countries; and to list these other countries. (AQW 8690/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The Department collects information on the volume of raw milk (milk requiring further processing) purchased from outside the north of Ireland by processors, but does not routinely collect information on where this milk has been sourced. In 2007, there were 19 million litres of whole milk, 32 million litres of skim milk and 6 million litres of cream purchased from outside the North. In 2008, there were 21 million litres of whole milk, 19 million litres of skim milk and 8 million litres of cream purchased from outside the North.

Exported Milk

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the amount of milk exported in (i) 2007; and (ii) 2008 to (a) England; (b) Wales; (c) Scotland; (d) Republic of Ireland; and (e) other countries; and to list these other countries. (AQW 8691/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The Department collects information on the amounts of raw milk (milk requiring further processing) exported or sold outside of the north of Ireland, but does not routinely collect information on the destination of this milk. The data on raw milk indicates that in 2007, there were 470 million litres of whole milk, 56 million litres of skim milk and 11 million litres of cream exported or sold outside of the North. In 2008, there were 502 million litres of whole milk, 51 million litres of skim milk and 6 million litres of cream exported or sold outside of the North.

Milk Prices

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the current price per litre paid to farmers for milk in (i) England; (ii) Wales; (iii) Scotland; and (iv) Northern Ireland. (AQW 8693/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Published average farmgate milk prices are available for Britain as a whole, but not separately for England, Scotland and Wales. The average farmgate milk price in Britain was 24.18 pence per litre in April 2009. The average farmgate milk price in the north of Ireland was 17.97 pence per litre in April 2009. These are the most recent comparable figures available and are net of transport charges.

PESCA Scheme

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what schemes and monies will replace the former PESCA scheme. (AQW 8716/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Between 1994 and 1999, the European PESCA Initiative provided local fishing dependent communities with £2.0m support for fishing, infrastructure and training projects. From 2000 to 2006, the Programme for Building Sustainable Prosperity, through Fisheries and Rural

Development resources, provided similar support to fishing areas, with an additional £6m committed through the Integrated Development Fund.

Presently, the €36.2m European Fisheries Fund, which will run to 2015, will offer fishing communities similar support to that previously available through PESCA, FIFG and the Integrated Development Fund.

Poultry Litter

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (i) how much poultry litter has been generated in the past twelve months; (ii) how this figure was calculated; (iii) how much of the poultry litter is used in mushroom composting; and (iv) how the remainder is used. (AQW 8842/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:

- (i) Approximately 200,000 tonnes of poultry litter was generated in 2008 in the north of Ireland.
- (ii) This estimate has been calculated from data on poultry production published in the DARD Statistical Review of NI Agriculture 2008 and research data on average quantities of manure generated on local poultry farms.
- (iii) Approximately 20% of poultry litter is currently used for the production of mushroom compost.
- (iv) The remainder is predominantly used as an organic fertiliser on arable crops and grassland. Approximately 3-8% is currently exported to Scotland for use in power generation and this depends on capacity being available at the power plant.

Nitrates and Phosphates Legislation

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (i) for an update on the nitrates and phosphates legislation; and (ii) to outline how poultry farmers can comply with this legislation. (AQW 8852/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:

- (i) The Nitrates Action Programme Regulations (NI) 2006 (Nitrates Regulations) and the Phosphorus (Use in Agriculture) Regulations (NI) 2006 (Phosphorus Regulations) were introduced on 1 January 2007. In accordance with the Nitrates Directive the Nitrates Regulations are subject to review by the end of 2010. This scientific review is currently being initiated by my Department and the Department of the Environment. In addition, my Department and the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute are conducting a review of current measures to address surplus phosphorus in the agricultural sector.
- (ii) The Nitrates Regulations place restrictions on when, where and how much poultry manure can be spread on land and how it must be stored. Most poultry farms are intensive livestock enterprises and therefore need to export poultry manure to comply with the livestock manure limit of 170kg/nitrogen/hectare/year. Poultry manure can be exported to other farms for use as an organic fertiliser on arable crops and grassland or to processing facilities such as, for the manufacture of mushroom compost.

When poultry litter is used as a fertiliser it must be applied to land in accordance with the requirements of the Nitrates Regulations which include the closed spreading period (15 October – 31 January), suitable soil and weather conditions, non-spreading zones around waterways and crop requirements.

The current Nitrates Regulations allowed the storage of poultry litter in field heaps and middens until the end of 2008. Due to delays in the development of an off-farm solution for the disposal of poultry litter both Departments are currently working on amendments to the Nitrates Regulations which will extend this temporary storage measure until the end of 2010.

To comply with the Phosphorus Regulations chemical fertilisers containing phosphorus must only be applied to land where a crop requirement for phosphorus is determined by a soil test.

DEPARTMENT OF CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE**Carter “Digital Britain” Report**

Mr D Ford asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for his assessment of Northern Ireland’s exclusion from the news pilot project in the Carter “Digital Britain” report; and if he has made any representations to the Department of Culture, Media and Sport in relation to the report. (AQW 8612/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr G Campbell): Following publication of the interim Digital Britain Report on 29 January 2009, my predecessor Gregory Campbell wrote to Lord Carter, the Minister for Communications, Technology and Broadcasting, asking him to engage directly with representatives of the broadcasting community in Northern Ireland. Consequently, Lord Carter organised a round table discussion on 23 April 2009, attended by Gregory Campbell and a range of stakeholders in the communications and media sectors here. The event was an opportunity to discuss the challenges and opportunities for Northern Ireland under the transition to the digital future and ensure that Northern Ireland’s interests were considered in the formulation of the Report.

I am aware that the final Digital Britain report includes a proposal for a pilot programme for news provision for the regions and that Northern Ireland has not been included in the proposed pilot programme.

The interim Digital Britain Report made no reference to the proposed pilot programme for news provision.

DCMS has advised that a decision was taken not to include Northern Ireland mainly because currently and for the foreseeable future the provision of regional news in Northern Ireland is considered to be on a more secure footing than that in other regions of the UK – notably Scotland and Wales.

The Digital Britain Report is complex and wide ranging. Officials are currently giving careful consideration as to how the proposals may impact on Northern Ireland. I will respond to DCMS in the near future outlining the Department’s perspective on the Report.

Ulster Scots Folk Orchestra

Mr P Butler asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for his assessment of the financial difficulties faced by the Ulster Scots Folk Orchestra. (AQW 8640/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Ulster-Scots Folk Orchestra has received funding from my Department through both the Arts Council of Northern Ireland and the Ulster-Scots Agency. The Arts Council awarded £51k to the Ulster-Scots Folk Orchestra between 2003 and 2006, and awarded a further £10k in 2008/09 towards a Pilot Youth Project. The Arts Council has approved in principle a further award of £25k in 2009/10 pending the outcome of this pilot. The Ulster-Scots Agency has provided £45.8k from 2007 to date, including £6.3k in 2007 for a Youth Project related to the Orchestra.

I am aware that the Orchestra has recently been facing some financial pressures as a result of a delay in receipt of funding from the Ulster-Scots Agency. Payments to the Orchestra from the Ulster-Scots Agency were delayed while clarification was sought in relation to supporting documentation. The Agency has confirmed that it has now processed a substantial outstanding payment in relation to work undertaken by the Orchestra, and is awaiting further paperwork to enable the release of a further payment.

I appreciate the valuable work done by the Ulster-Scots Folk Orchestra in terms of promoting Ulster-Scots cultural traditions. The Arts Council and the Ulster-Scots Agency are working closely with the Orchestra in relation to future funding opportunities.

Free Swimming for Under Sixteen Year Olds

Mr J O’Dowd asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if his Department plans to give financial support to local Councils to assist with the provision of free swimming for under sixteen year olds in Council leisure facilities. (AQW 8758/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: District councils are responsible for leisure and recreational provision within their own areas. Any decision to provide free swimming for under sixteen year olds therefore

rests with the relevant council. Sport Northern Ireland (SNI), which is responsible for the development of sport including the distribution of funding, has no plans to provide financial support to councils in this matter. SNI is however, aware that similar initiatives have been tried elsewhere in the UK and would be happy to explore these further in partnership with the Chief Leisure Officers Association should they deem it appropriate and relevant.

Irish Language

Mr B McElduff asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the extent of consultation his Department has undertaken with the Irish language speaking community in relation to the draft language strategy including the number and dates of consultation meetings in the past two years. (AQW 8799/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Representatives from my Department have met with the Irish language speaking community on eight occasions on issues relating to the draft strategy in the last two years. This includes:

- 3 meetings with Pobal – 24 January 2008, 30 September 2008 and 4 June 2009
- 2 meetings with Sinn Féin – 20 October 2008 and 16 June 2009
- 2 meetings with Foras na Gaeilge – 24 January 2008 and 28 October 2008
- A meeting with the Irish Guild of the Church of Ireland – 19 January 2009

Former Minister Poots also met with Sinn Féin on three occasions (26 July 2007, 5 November 2007 and 18 February 2008) on Irish language issues.

Formal consultation on the Strategy for Indigenous or Regional Minority Languages will form part of the policy development process.

Irish Language

Mr B McElduff asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the key recommendations proposed by the Irish language speaking community on the draft language strategy. (AQW 8800/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: As the Indigenous or Regional Minority Languages Strategy has not yet been approved by the Executive no public consultation on the Strategy has taken place. However, several recommendations have been made to my Department by the Irish speaking community, including:

- Pobal and Sinn Féin recommended a separate strategy for Irish, separate funding streams for Irish and Ulster-Scots and additional money for the Irish Language Broadcast Fund.
- Foras na Gaeilge recommended an improvement in front line civil service provision in Irish, a language skills audit of NICS staff and a programme to develop training in Irish for civil servants.
- The Irish Guild of the Church of Ireland recommended the depoliticisation of the Irish language and a positive approach to public discourse on the Irish and Ulster-Scots languages in order to build maturity, understanding and tolerance in communities.

It is my intention that the strategy will create a framework which will ensure the Ulster-Scots culture, heritage and language and Irish language are given equal respect and recognition.

Irish Language

Mr B McElduff asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail how his Department's Irish language strategy will fulfil the requirements outlined by the vice-Chairperson of COMEX, "to be coherent, long-term, proactive, containing a variety of measures and also having a monitoring system by which one can assess the measures used and results achieved". (AQW 8801/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: It is my intention that the Strategy for Indigenous or Regional Minority Languages will enhance and protect the development of the Irish language and Ulster-Scots culture, heritage and language in line with the St Andrews Agreement.

Once agreed, the Committee of Experts will have the opportunity to comment on the Strategy through the periodical reporting cycle of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.

Draft Language Strategy

Mr B McElduff asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail how the draft Language Strategy will deal with the Irish language to reflect its own circumstances and requirements, as advised by COMEX. (AQW 8802/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Strategy will be underpinned by the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, which takes into account the relative position of each individual language.

It is my intention that the strategy will create a framework which will ensure the Ulster-Scots culture, heritage and language and Irish language are given equal respect and recognition.

Good relations cannot be built on uneven foundations and the promotion of one language must be based on an equitable approach to the other.

Irish Language

Mr B McElduff asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline what discussions he has had with other members of the Executive to ensure joined-up thinking on promoting the Irish language. (AQW 8803/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I have not yet had the opportunity to liaise with Executive colleagues on language issues.

I would intend to engage with the Executive on the near future on the way forward for the Indigenous or Regional Minority Language Strategy which will address the position for both Ulster-Scots and Irish.

Royal Irish Regiment Museum Group

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline any discussions the Royal Irish Regiment Museum Group has had with the Northern Ireland Museums Council about finding a suitable location for building a new museum. (AQW 8814/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Northern Ireland Museums Council has not had any formal discussions with the Royal Irish Regiment Museum Group concerning the siting of a new Regimental Museum.

Fisheries

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (i) what assistance is available to fisheries that are leased or rented from his Department; and (ii) how many fisheries in Strangford qualify for this assistance. (AQW 8849/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: DCAL does not own any lakes or fisheries.

The Public Angling Estate consists of 64 fisheries where the fishing rights are exercised or leased by DCAL to provide affordable angling to the public.

The Department have entered into management agreements with various angling clubs to manage a small number of these angling waters on the Department's behalf.

The Department encourages these angling clubs to open up their waters to DCAL permit holders by stocking these waters where clubs provide evidence of day tickets issued to DCAL permit holders at the end of the angling season. This clause is stipulated on many of the management agreements.

The Department's technical staff provide clubs with free advice and guidance on management and development of waters through meetings, site visits and talks at club meetings and AGM's.

The Lough Cowey fishery is the only Public Angling water in the Strangford area. Stocking is stipulated in their management agreement and the angling club receives technical advice and guidance.

The Department would also consider additional stocking for charity, juvenile and disabled events organised by the angling club.

Fisheries

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the number of lakes and fisheries owned by his Department that are leased or rented out. (AQW 8860/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: DCAL does not own any lakes or fisheries.

Rather, the Department maintains a Public Angling Estate by leasing sporting and fishing rights from landowners and exercising fishing rights in Government / public ownership. There are some 64 game and coarse fisheries developed for public use

The Department have entered into management agreements with various angling clubs to manage angling waters on their behalf.

The Department have two waters where the fishing rights are subleased, Castlehume Lough, Co Fermanagh and Lough Na Cranagh and Lough Doo, Ballycastle Co Antrim.

Fisheries

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the cost, per fishery, for returns of fish caught in fisheries owned by his Department that are leased out or rented. (AQW 8861/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Department does not hold this information.

Fisheries

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the returns of fish caught in Department owned fisheries that are rented or leased out. (AQW 8862/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Department does not hold this information.

Royal Irish Regiment Museum Group

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what assistance has his Department given to the Royal Irish Regiment Museum Group to locate to Cultra, Holywood. (AQW 8863/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: To assist the possible relocation to Cultra a meeting was held on 3 June 2008 between one of my predecessors and the various interested parties which included representatives from the MOD, National Museums Northern Ireland and officials from DCAL. The Minister indicated that in principle he was supportive of the proposals but that the issue required further consideration. I can confirm that I will be giving the issue further consideration with the various interested parties.

Draft Language Strategy

Mr B McElduff asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (i) to detail the discussions he, or his predecessor, has had with the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs on the draft Language Strategy; and (ii) if his Department will ensure that the strategy for promoting the Irish language will complement the Irish Government's 2028 strategy. (AQW 8868/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: There have been no discussions between Minister O'Cuiv and myself, or my predecessor, in relation to the draft Languages Strategy.

The Indigenous or Regional Minority Languages Strategy will enhance and protect the development of Ulster-Scots culture, heritage and language and the Irish language in line with the St Andrews Agreement.

The Irish Government's 2028 Strategy has not yet been finalised or published and will not apply to Northern Ireland.

Press and Public Relations Staff

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the number of staff employed in his press and public relations department and their overall cost in each year from 2003/04. (AQW 8886/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

Year	Staff Numbers By Grade		Cost ¹
	Administrative	Information Officer (IO)	
2003/04	2	1	£98,170
2004/05	2	1	£112,929.20
2005/06	1	2	£110,966.16
2006/07	1	3	£146,490
2007/08	2	3	£154,920
2008/09	2	3	£158,540

1. Total costs only are shown due to the small number of staff employed in this area; to show administrative and IO grades separately could identify individual members of staff.

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Braidside Integrated School

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of Education for an update on when the Braidside Integrated School will be provided with a new building to replace the existing mobile classrooms. (AQW 7109/09)

Minister of Education (Ms C Ruane): Cuireadh Staidéar Indéantachta Nuashonraithe le haghaidh scéim móroibreacha chaipitil do Braidside Integrated Primary School isteach i mí na Samhna 2008 agus tá sé faoi bhreithniú ag an Roinn faoi láthair.

An updated Feasibility Study for a major capital works scheme for Braidside Integrated Primary School was submitted in November 2008 and is currently being considered by the Department. Following approval of a Feasibility Study, an Economic Appraisal to determine the preferred option will be completed. Schemes with approved Economic Appraisals are eligible for consideration for the capital programme. However, at this stage it is not possible to say when funding would be available for a scheme.

Secondary Schools

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of Education (i) to list the secondary schools which are over-subscribed for the academic year 2009/10 and; (ii) what steps she is taking to ensure pupils are accommodated in these schools. (AQW 7493/09)

Minister of Education: I am interpreting the term secondary schools to mean non-grammar schools. The processes for transfer from primary to post-primary school will not be completed until 29 May 2009 therefore final details of non-grammar schools which are oversubscribed will not be known until then. The Department does, however, have details of non-grammar schools that were oversubscribed at first preference and these are listed below.

- Ashfield Girls' High School
- Ashfield Boys' High School
- La Salle Boys' School
- Hazelwood College
- Oakgrove College

- Drumragh College
- Ballyclare Secondary School
- St Colm's High School
- St Paul's College, Kilrea
- St Pius X High School
- St Patrick's College, Maghera
- Slemish College, Ballymena
- Ulidia Integrated College
- Nendrum College, Comber
- Lagan College
- Shimna Integrated College
- Strangford Integrated College
- Newtownhamilton High School
- Markethill High School
- Fivemiletown High School
- St Paul's High School, Bessbrook
- St Catherine's College
- New-Bridge Integrated College, Loughbrickland

While the policy of open enrolment enables parents to state their preferences for the schools they wish their children to attend, admission to individual schools are necessarily limited by their approved admissions and enrolment numbers. If oversubscribed with applications the Board of Governors is required to apply its published admissions criteria to decide which pupils to admit. Responsibility for drawing up and applying admissions criteria rests entirely with the Board of Governors of each school and reflects the Governors' priorities for admission to their school.

Bíonn an Roinn i gcónaí toilteanach breithniú a dhéanamh ar iarratais ó scoileanna le hathruithe sealadacha a lorg ar a líonta iontrála agus rollaithe. Ach nuair a bhíonn iarratais dá leithéid á mbreithniú, caithfidh an Roinn a thabhairt san áireamh cé acu an bhfuil fáil ar áiteanna malairte scoile d'fhonn eastát inmharthana scoile a chothabháil.

The Department is always willing to consider requests from schools for temporary variations to their admissions and enrolment numbers.

Autism Centre, Middletown

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Education what discussions she has held with contacts in the Republic of Ireland to ensure that funding for the Autism Centre at Middletown continues. (AQW 7949/09)

Minister of Education: Scríobh mé chuig an Aire Oideachais agus Eolaíochta, Batt O'Keefe, dhá uair le déanaí leis an díoma atá orm mar gheall ar an socrú a rinne sé a chur in iúl dó. D'iarr mé air athbhreithniú a dhéanamh ar an socrú maidir le cistiú d'Ionad Choillidh Channanáin le haghaidh Uathachais, socrú a chuirfidh moill ar an leathnú atá pleanáilte don Ionad. Chas an tUasal O'Keefe agus mé féin ar a chéile ag cruinniú na hEarnála Oideachais mar chuid den Chomhairle Aireachta Thuaidh Theas ar 20 Bealtaine 2009.

I have written to the Minister for Education and Science, Batt O'Keefe twice in recent weeks expressing my disappointment in his decision. I have requested a review of his decision regarding funding for the Middletown Centre for Autism, which he has suggested will cause a pause in the planned expansion of the Centre. Mr O'Keefe and I met at the Education Sectoral meeting of the North South Ministerial Council on 20 May 2009 where I raised this matter with him directly.

The Minister has assured me that the Department for Education and Science (DES) is anxious to develop the Centre and recognises that a lot has already been achieved in collaboration with Department of Education to deliver the training programmes and commission research and he is keen to ensure the continuation of the ongoing training and research programmes.

He has confirmed that DES is not withdrawing funding from the Centre and that it will continue to be enabled to provide current services and indeed to develop some additional services.

The vision of both Departments for the Centre has been that, as a result of the in-depth educational assessment services to be offered, local service providers would be able to better meet the needs of our most challenged autistic children.

I have advised Minister O’Keeffe that I am unable to accept the proposed cuts and that in view of the fact that a commitment was given jointly by both education departments to establish the Centre that any decision to change those plans should also be taken jointly. My officials are meeting with their counterparts in DES and I will continue to work towards the full development of the Middletown Centre for Autism.

Proposed Primary School at Carrick, Warrenpoint

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister of Education to confirm that all the required information and paperwork from the proposers in relation to the proposal to build a new primary school at Carrick, Warrenpoint is now in her possession; and when the tendering process will commence. (AQW 8192/09)

Minister of Education: Ní bhfuarthas go fóill an t-eolas breise a iarradh ó Chomhairleoirí na scoile a ligfeadh don Roinn athbhreithniú iomlán a dhéanamh ar iarratas costais an réamhthairisceana. Scríobh mo Roinn arís chuig Iontaobhaithe na scoile ar 28 Bealtaine 2009 ag iarraidh orthu an t-eolas seo a chur isteach chomh luath agus ab fhéidir.

The additional information requested from the school’s Consultants to enable the Department to fully consider the Pre-tender cost submission has not yet been received. My Department wrote again to the school Trustees on 28 May 2009 requesting that this information be submitted as soon as possible.

The acquisition/vesting of the additional land has also been further delayed following a recent request from the Parish Trustees, the current owners, for the land to be re-valued. My Department has agreed to this request and the revised valuation is currently awaited from Land and Property Services. It is anticipated that this will be received in the near future to enable the vesting process to be completed.

In light of the above it is not possible to accurately advise when the tendering process for Carrick P.S. will commence.

Transfer 2010

Mr D Kennedy asked the Minister of Education to confirm the circumstances in which (i) maintained grammar schools; (ii) controlled grammar schools; and (iii) voluntary grammar schools can avail of an educational psychometric to conduct psychological tests under Transfer 2010 arrangements. (AQW 8418/09)

Minister of Education: Ní gá teist a chur ar pháiste ar bith atá 10 nó 11 bhliain d’aois leis an phróiseas aistrithe chuig an iar-bhunscoil a shocrú má chloíonn scoileanna le Treoir na Roinne ar Aistriú 2010, a cuireadh i gcrích ar 25 Meitheamh 2009.

There is no need for children aged 10 or 11 to be tested in order to inform the process of transfer to a post-primary school if schools follow the Department’s Transfer 2010 Guidance, finalised on 25 June 2009. For schools contemplating the use of entrance tests in contravention of the Guidance, paragraph 34 explains that such schools will be required to make independent arrangements for assessing children who, under the outgoing Transfer Test arrangements, would have been able to avail of an educational psychologist assessment under the special provisions procedure to inform their application to a grammar school. These independent arrangements must be capable of supporting fair and robust admissions decisions.

Educational psychologist assessments will however still play a part in the transfer of children with statements of special educational need. We must ensure scarce educational psychologist resources are utilised in the most appropriate way.

Pupils with Disabilities

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Education to detail (a) the obligations her Department is under when facilitating pupils with disabilities; (b) the relevant legislation under which this obligation is framed; and (c) to confirm that any measures which must be taken at school in order to facilitate pupils with disabilities, are funded by her Department. (AQW 8473/09)

Minister of Education:

- (a) Mar is amhlaidh le gach Roinn eile, bíonn dualgas ar an Roinn Oideachais a chinntiú go mbíonn daltaí atá faoi mhíchumas ábalta rochtain a fháil ar na seirbhísí a sholáthraíonn sí. Is é an fócas atá againn ná a chinntiú go soláthraítear oideachas d'ardchaighdeán a chuidíonn le gach páiste lena gcumas iomlán a bhaint amach.

As with all Departments, the Department of Education has a responsibility to ensure that pupils with disabilities can access the services it oversees. Our focus is on ensuring a high quality education that helps every child reach their full potential.

The Department in delivering its statutory responsibilities makes sure that it complies with statutory requirements to enhance and safeguard the needs of children and young people with disabilities and/or Special Educational Needs (SEN).

The Special Educational Needs and Disability Order (SENDO), which came into effect on 1 September 2005, makes it unlawful for schools to discriminate against a child on grounds of a disability and requires them to make reasonable adjustments. Every aspect of school life is covered by this including after schools clubs and activities provided by schools to their own pupils.

SENDO strengthens the rights of SEN pupils to be educated in mainstream schools. SENDO also makes it unlawful for schools to treat pupils with a disability less favourably than other pupils in all aspects of school life and places a duty on schools to work towards making school life more accessible to pupils with a disability in terms of accessibility to premises, the curriculum and written information.

The legislation requires Education and Library Boards (ELB's) to make arrangements for services to provide parents of children with SEN with advice and information, and a means of resolving disputes with schools and Boards.

There is also a requirement on the Education and Library Boards to comply, within prescribed periods, with orders of the Special Educational Needs Tribunal and makes other changes to the Tribunal appeals process and the statutory assessment process.

Schools are required to inform parents that they are making Special Educational provision for their child and allow parents a right of appeal where a Board refuses a school's request for a statutory assessment of a pupil's SEN.

The Department's Review of Special Educational Needs and Inclusion is awaiting the agreement of the Executive, prior to a full consultation.

The collection and recording of standard information about children with special educational needs is an essential factor in special educational planning and policy development, identification of current and future funding needs and for monitoring trends.

Individual schools and other education providers are subject to inspection by the Education and Training Inspectorate on a regular cycle. Inspections focus on a broad range of quality indicators including the school's capacity to support children with learning difficulties and disabilities.

- (b) Under Articles 8 and 13 of the Education (NI) Order 1996, as amended by the Special Educational Needs and Disability (NI) Order 2005 (SENDO), the statutory responsibility for securing provision for SEN pupils rests with School Boards of Governors and ELBs.

There is a substantial range of duties, which requires schools and ELBs to identify children with SEN and to make appropriate provision for them.

A Dispute Avoidance and Resolution Service (DARS) and an Advice and Information Service were introduced in September 2005 to provide improved supports for SEN children and their parents in their dealings with schools and ELBs. The remit of the SEN Tribunal was expanded to hear disability discrimination claims.

A statutory supplement to DE's existing Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of SEN was published in 2005 to provide guidance on the new SENDO framework.

A new Code of Practice for Schools on the disability discrimination aspects of SENDO was produced at DE's request on the disability discrimination aspects of SENDO.

A SENDO awareness training programme was also developed and delivered to all schools and relevant ELB staff in 2005/06.

The following legislation impacts on the delivery of educational provision to children and young people with a disability and/or a Special Educational Need in this jurisdiction:-

Primary Legislation

- Education (NI) Order 1987
- Education Reform (NI) Order 1989
- Education and Libraries (NI) 1993
- Disability Discrimination Act 1995
- Education (NI) Order 1996
- Education (NI) Order 1997
- Northern Ireland Act 1998
- Education (NI) Order 1998
- Education and Libraries (NI) Order 2003
- The Special Educational Needs and Disability (NI) Order 2005
- Education (NI) Order 2006
- Disability Discrimination (NI) Order 2006

Subordinate Legislation – Education

- Statutory Rule 1998 No. 217
Education (Special Educational Needs) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 1998
- Statutory Rule 1998 No. 205
Education (Special Educational Needs Code of Practice) (Appointed Day) (NI) Order 1998
- Statutory Rule 1997 No. 327
Education (Special Educational Needs) Regulations (NI) 1997
- Statutory Rule 1997 No. 315
Special Educational Needs Tribunal Regulations (NI) 1997
- Statutory Rule 2005 No 384
The Education (Special Educational Needs) Regulations (NI) 2005
- Statutory Rule 2005 No 339
Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal Regulations (NI) 2005
- Statutory Rule 2008 No 79
The Special Educational Needs and Disability (General Qualifications Bodies) (Relevant Qualifications, Reasonable Steps and Physical Features) Regulations (NI) 2008
- Statutory Rule 2008 No 177
The Special Educational Needs and Disability (2005 Order) (Amendment) (General Qualifications Bodies) (Alteration of Premises and Enforcement) Regulations (NI) 2008
- Statutory Rule 2009 No 20
The Special Educational Needs and Disability (General Qualifications Bodies) (Relevant Qualifications, Reasonable Steps and Physical Features) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2009

In addition, the Department's Building Branch refers to the Building Regulations (NI) 2000 in planning and providing for adjustments to the built environment in schools in policies and Building handbooks.

All Building Branch policies, and the adjustments required by them, reflect the statutory position and technical requirements to account for the full range of needs of pupils, staff and public accessing the school estate.

In addition, under section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (as amended by Article 5 of the Disability Discrimination (NI) Order 2006) the Department, in common with all public authorities, must have due regard to the need to:

- promote positive attitudes towards disabled people; and
 - encourage participation by disabled people in public life.
- (c) Grant-aid funding in relation to reasonable adjustment for special educational needs and disabilities remains consistent with existing Department of Education grant funding guidelines and arrangements.

Schools and school authorities are responsible for ensuring that reasonable adjustments to information and curriculum provision are made as necessary to meet pupils' needs.

Capital costs for improving physical accessibility in controlled schools are financed by Education and Library Boards.

Schools in other sectors are grant-aided directly by the Department of Education, as long as the Department's prior approval has been obtained.

Any school not eligible for capital grant-aid by the Department of Education must self-finance their capital works to ensure that they are compliant with statutory duties.

Independent schools must finance all aspects of accessibility from their own resources to ensure that their own arrangements are in line with all statutory requirements.

Disabilities

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Education how many staff are employed in (i) her Department; and (ii) each Education and Library Board to look after the welfare of (a) pupils with disabilities; and (b) teaching staff with disabilities. (AQW 8482/09)

Minister of Education: Ní fhostaíonn an Roinn Oideachais foirne go sonrach le haire a thabhairt ar leas na ndaltaí nó leas na bhfoirne múinteoireachta a bhfuil mhíchumas orthu.

The Department of Education does not employ staff to specifically look after the welfare of pupils or teaching staff with disabilities.

I have been advised by the Chief Executives of the Education and Library Boards (ELBs) that the information requested in respect of ELB staff is not available. Numerous staff such as Education Psychologists, bus drivers, bus escorts, supervisory assistants, general assistants, classroom assistants etc. provide support to all pupils with special educational needs including those with a disability. It is not, therefore, possible to provide a figure specifically in respect of pupils with a disability.

With regard to teaching staff with disabilities there are again a number of ELB staff who are responsible for dealing with the health and welfare of teaching staff including those with a disability.

Saintfield High School

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Education what measures she will take to ensure the provision of a new sports hall at Saintfield High School. (AQW 8676/09)

Minister of Education: Breathnófar an tionscadal seo, mar aon le tionscadail eile mar chuid den chéad fhógairt eile de New Starts. Níl aon dáta socraithe faoi láthair d'fhógairt dá leithéid.

This project will be considered, along with others for inclusion in the next New Starts announcement. At present there is no date set for such an announcement.

School Buildings, Strabane

Mr P Doherty asked the Minister of Education if her Department has any statutory role or responsibility for the disposal of buildings and associated grounds at (i) Our Lady of Mercy Secondary School; and (ii) Mount Carmel Convent Grammar School, in Strabane. (AQW 8733/09)

Minister of Education: When school premises cease to be used for educational purposes, my Department will recover grants paid out of the proceeds from the disposal of the former premises, in accordance with Regulations made under Article 116 of the Education and Libraries (NI) Order 1986.

Is iad na hIontaobhaithe, mar úinéirí na n-iarscoileanna, a bhíonn freagrach as bearta diúscartha.

Responsibility for disposal action rests with the Trustees as owners of the former schools.

Nursery Places

Mrs N Long asked the Minister of Education on what basis the Department plans the distribution of nursery places across Education and Library Board areas. (AQW 8740/09)

Minister of Education: Is í aidhm an Chláir um Fhorleathnú Oideachais Réamhscoile ná oideachas réamschoile maoinithe d'ardchaighdeán a sholáthar, sa bhliain roimh oideachas éigeantach, do gach páiste a bhfuil an mhian sin ag a t(h)uismitheoirí.

The aim of the Pre-School Education Expansion Programme is to provide one year of high quality funded pre-school education, in the year before compulsory education, for every child whose parents wish it.

The Programme has been implemented by a partnership approach with funded pre-school provision available both in the statutory nursery sector and in funded places in voluntary and private pre-school settings.

In the school year 2008/09, there were 20,683 children in funded pre-school education: 14,080 in nursery schools or nursery classes in primary schools; and 6,603 in funded places in voluntary and private pre-school education centres. In addition, there were 606 children in reception classes/groups.

The capacity of each statutory setting does not generally change from year to year. The allocation of the voluntary/private places to each Education and Library Board is based on the previous year's allocation. The allocation of places by each Board's Pre-School Education Advisory Group is monitored by the Department and adjustments made between Boards, in year, where this proves necessary.

Nursery Places

Mrs N Long asked the Minister of Education whether she liaises with health visitors in planning the distribution of nursery places. (AQW 8741/09)

Minister of Education: Níl aon chomhairliúchán díreach le banaltraí cheantair sna socrúithe iontrála bliaintúla chuig suíomhanna réamhscoile nuair atá dáileadh áiteanna naiscoile á phleanáil.

There is no direct consultation with health visitors in planning the distribution of nursery places in the annual admissions arrangements to pre-school settings.

However, the views of the relevant Pre-School Education Advisory Group (PEAG) are sought and the membership of the PEAG includes representation from the Health and Social Care Trusts.

I am aware that those social workers with responsibility for the registration and inspection of pre-school providers in the voluntary and private sector, may liaise with health visitors during this process, responsibility for which rests with the Health and Social Care Trusts and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. As you may be aware my Department funds pre-school places in a number of these voluntary and private pre-school settings under the Pre-school Education Expansion Programme.

Pupils Suspended and Excluded

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister of Education how many pupils aged under 7 have been (i) suspended and (ii) excluded from school, for violent behaviour, broken down by (a) each of the 26 local government districts; and (b) gender. (AQW 8748/09)

Minister of Education: Bailítear eolas ar dhaltáí ar fhionraí agus ar dhaltáí ar díchuireadh iad ar bhonn bliantúil óna Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlainne agus foilsítear é ar shuíomh gréasáin na Roinne i ndiaidh próisis anailíse mionshonraithe. Baineann na staiticí is deireanaí atá ag an Roinn leis an bhliain scoile 2007/08.

Information on pupil suspensions and expulsions is collected annually from the Education and Library Boards and published on the Department's website following a detailed analysis process. The most recent statistics held by the Department are for the 2007/08 school year.

I can advise that there were 23 pupils aged under seven suspended for a physical attack on a pupil, physical attack on staff or both during the 2007/08 school year. In the same year, there were no pupils aged under seven expelled from school.

Due to the small numbers involved, it would be inappropriate for me to provide a breakdown by either gender or District Council area as this would breach our disclosure policy in relation to data protection and confidentiality.

Post Graduate Certificate in Education

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of Education if she has any plans to increase the number of places available at the University of Ulster campus in Coleraine for students wishing to study the Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) course in primary education. (AQW 8796/09)

Minister of Education: Bhí líon na n-áiteanna a d'fhaomh mé do sholáthróirí aonair oideachais tosaigh múinteoirí (ITE) don bhliain acadúil 2009/10 bunaithe ar riachtanais an chórais scoile, sa ghearrthréimhse agus san fhadthréimhse, ar chúrsaí déimeagrafacha maidir le céimeanna aonair oideachais agus ar riachtanais earnálacha áirithe.

The number of places which I approved for the individual initial teacher education (ITE) providers for the 2009/10 academic year was based on the needs of our school system, both in the short and longer term, and the demographic position in relation to the individual phases of education and the needs of specific sectors. Of key importance also was the need to give careful consideration to the recommendations set out in the Report on the Review of Teacher Education produced by the Assembly's Committee for Employment and Learning.

In light of the above factors, I have no plans at present to increase the number of primary PGCE places at the University of Ulster for the 2009/10 academic year. However, as part of the annual process of determining intakes to ITE, I will continue to monitor the position and will give careful consideration to maintaining and developing the capacity for local ITE providers to educate teachers in the future to meet the needs of our school system.

Redistribution of Schools Funding

Mr K McCarthy asked the Minister of Education whether funding for a school that closes is redistributed to other schools in the area. (AQW 8821/09)

Minister of Education: The Common Funding Scheme which determines the funding arrangements for all grant-aided schools funded under the Local Management of Schools (LMS) arrangements makes provision that, where a school closes in mid-year as a result of an approved Development Proposal, the Funding Authority will adjust the initial budget allocation for that school pro-rata for the months that the school is planned to remain open during the relevant financial year.

Tabharfaidh an tÚdarás Cistithe leithdháileadh cistithe pro-rata ansin, ón bhuiséad tosaigh atá fágtha ón scoil atá dúnta, do bhuiséad gach scoile glactha i leith gach dalta atá ag aistriú ón scoil atá dúnta.

The Funding Authority will then provide a pro-rata funding allocation, from within the remaining initial budget of the closed school, to each of the receiving schools' budgets in respect of all pupils transferring from the closed school. Any part of the closed school's pro rata share of the budget left unspent is retained within the Funding Authority's Contingency Fund.

Primary Movement Programme

Dr S Farry asked the Minister of Education for her assessment of the outcome and policy conclusions drawn, from the research commissioned by her Department in 2005 into the Primary Movement programme developed at Queen's University, Belfast. (AQW 8827/09)

Minister of Education: To complement the costs being funded by the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) towards an evaluation of the Primary Movement Programme led by the Queen's University (QUB) School of Psychology, the Department of Education (DE) also provided part funding of £28,000 in the 2001/02 financial year for the training of the cohort of teachers who participated in this Programme. This research and evaluation was carried out in the South Eastern Education and Library Board area and tracked the academic performance of children before and after completing the Primary Movement Programme.

I understand that the outcomes of the research were presented to CCEA in 2006.

While CCEA has a statutory duty to advise my Department on matters relating to the statutory curriculum, assessment and examinations, DE's policy on specific interventions, such as Primary Movement, is that it does not promote one type of intervention over another.

Agus measúnú á dhéanamh ar riachtanais páistí a bhfuil riachtanais speisialta oideachais acu, socraíonn na Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlainne leibhéal agus cineál an tsoláthair ar bhonn aonair.

In assessing the needs of children with special educational needs, the level and type of provision is determined on an individual basis by the Education and Library Boards.

Childcare Organisations

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Education if her Department has a lead agency for liaising with, and supporting, school age childcare organisations; and, if so, does this agency utilise cross-departmental links in its work with this sector. (AQW 8831/09)

Minister of Education: Ní thugann an Roinn cistiú ná tacaíocht d'eagraíochtaí cúram páistí d'aois scoile.

The Department does not fund nor provide support to school age childcare organisations.

Funding for Childcare Organisations

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Education to detail funding provided to (i) child-care organisations; and (ii) school age child-care organisations, in each of the last five years. (AQW 8833/09)

Minister of Education: The Department of Education has provided funding to the NI Childminding Association (NICMA) since the transfer of Early Years policy responsibility in November 2006. Prior to this, the organisation was funded by DHSSPS. The funding provided to NICMA in each of the last 5 years to cover central administration costs was:

2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
£62,456	£64,330	£66,260	£67,917	£65,000

Chomh maith leis sin, thug an Roinn Oideachais cúnamh airgeadais do staidéar taighde maidir le héileamh tuismitheoirí d'fheighlíocht páistí. Tugadh cistiú de £13,766 sa bhliain 2007/08.

In addition, DE contributed towards a research study into the parental demand for childminding. This funding amounted to £13,766 in 2007/08.

Working Tax Credit

Mr W Irwin asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 8409/09, given that receipt of Working Families Tax Credit is a bar to qualifying for the School Uniform Allowance; what plans she has to change the qualifying criteria to include farming families on Working Tax Credit whose income has not exceeded £16,040, due to the current economic difficulties facing the agriculture industry. (AQW 8838/09)

Minister of Education: Níl aon phlean agam faoi láthair le hathrú a dhéanamh ar an chritéar cáilitheachta le haghaidh an deontas éide scoile.

I have no plans at present to change the eligibility criteria for the award of the school uniform grant.

Working Tax Credit provides additional financial support to families working more than 16 hours per week that have low incomes. Uniform grants are available only to families where the adults work for less than 16 hours per week, as they are considered to be most in need of this additional help.

However, in recognition of the difficulties which a number of families are facing at this time I announced in March that the current Clothing Allowances Scheme would be extended to cover primary school children as well as those in post-primary schools. This is the first time that such a measure has been taken here.

It is my hope that the new primary school allowance will provide some support to families right across the north of Ireland.

The allowance will be £35 and I would ask you to encourage those of your constituents who meet the eligibility criteria to apply for it.

Pupils with Epilepsy

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 8507/09, how many schools have requested training for teachers to deal with pupils with epilepsy, broken down by Council area, in each of the last five years. (AQW 8873/09)

Minister of Education: The Chief Executives of the Education and Library Boards have advised that there are no recorded requests from teachers for training to deal with pupils with epilepsy in each of the last five years.

Tuigim áfach, gur féidir le scoileanna oiliúint dá leithéid a iarraidh go díreach ón Iontaobhas Seirbhísí Sláinte agus Sóisialta áitiúil.

I understand, however, that schools may request such training directly from their local Health and Social Services Trust.

School-Age Childcare Groups

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Education what departmental support is available to school-age childcare groups. (AQW 8923/09)

Minister of Education: Ní thugann an Roinn Oideachais cistiú ná tacaíocht do ghrúpaí cúram páistí d'aois scoile. The Department of Education does not fund nor provide support to school age childcare groups.

Strategic Plan for Childcare

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Education if her Department has considered the drafting of a strategic plan for childcare, covering both pre-school and school-age children. (AQW 8927/09)

Minister of Education: Tá grúpa oibre curtha ar bun ag an Fhochoiste Airí um Páistí agus Dhaoine Óga le páipéar ar roghanna cúram páistí a dhréachtú. Ag cruinniú na nAirí de 18ú Meitheamh 2009, socraíodh go gcuirfead na roghanna faoi bhreithmheas eacnamaíochta.

A working group has been mandated by the Ministerial Sub Committee on Children and Young People to draft a childcare options paper. At the Ministerial meeting of 18th June 2009, it was agreed that the options would be subject to economic appraisal.

Roma Children

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister of Education how many (i) Roma children are enrolled in schools; and (ii) Roma children who recently left Northern Ireland were enrolled in local primary schools. (AQW 8957/09)

Minister of Education: Níl eolas daonáirimh ag mo Roinn faoi láthair ar pháistí Romacha atá rollaithe i scoileanna anseo. Beidh catagóir 'Romach' sa daonáireamh bliantúil scoile ó Dheireadh Fómhair 2009 áfach, le léargas níos cruinne a thabhairt ar líon na bpáistí atá rollaithe sa scoil agus ar na scoileanna a bhfuil siad ag freastal orthu.

At present my Department does not have census information for Roma children who are enrolled in schools. However, from October 2009 there will be a 'Roma' category in the annual school census to provide a more accurate picture of how many children are enrolled in school and which schools they are attending.

I have been greatly saddened by the recent displays of racism in our community, in particular against Roma families who have had to face the challenge of discrimination due to being members of a historically nomadic group. I am aware that other nationalities who have settled here have also suffered various forms of discrimination, through ignorance and lack of understanding, racial prejudice and racial harassment.

Our schools are working hard to become truly diverse by creating multicultural environments with understanding and respect for all pupils. My Department has put a number of support mechanisms in place to help schools ensure that those children who are newcomers and who do not have a language in common with the teacher, including Roma children, receive a fair and equal education.

Along with the Education and Library Boards the Department has established the regional Inclusion and Diversity Service to strengthen and improve support to newcomer pupils and in April 2009 the Department published the policy 'Every School a Good School – Supporting Newcomer Pupils'. Schools with Roma children receive additional support through both the newcomer and Traveller community factors of the Common Funding Formula, a total of £1,010 per child for the 2009/10 year, in recognition of the particular challenges in improving attendance and attainment levels. Roma children will also benefit from updated eligibility criteria for free school meals, to enable schools to provide meals to pupils on humanitarian grounds, where the need exists.

Furthermore, the additional needs of Roma children will be considered as part of the work of the Taskforce on Traveller Education, which I established last year.

DEPARTMENT FOR EMPLOYMENT AND LEARNING

Steps to Work

Mr D Kennedy asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to confirm the retention percentage of each of the Steps to Work, strands, broken down by Jobs and Benefit Office areas in Co. Antrim. (AQW 8567/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning (Sir Reg Empey): Steps to Work is an employment programme designed to help participants find employment at the earliest opportunity. Retention is not a feature of the programme and management information is therefore not collected. The programme is aimed at achieving employment outcomes and participants may leave before their expected completion date for a variety of reasons, including that they have taken up employment.

Steps to Work

Mr D Kennedy asked the Minister for Employment and Learning (i) if the retention percentage statistics for the Steps to Work Programme match his Department's targets; (ii) to compare the statistics with targets submitted to his Department under the TWL Training implementation plan. (AQW 8568/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: Steps to Work is designed to assist people move into employment as soon as possible and retention is not a feature of the programme. The Department does not therefore collect management information on retention nor is there a target or performance indicator for programme retention. The Department placed no requirement on Steps to Work Lead Contractors to submit implementation plans or individual targets.

Stranmillis College

Mr B Wilson asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to ensure that the staff from Stranmillis College involved in the merger with Queen's University will have their jobs protected and not be subject to the cuts being carried out by Queen's University. (AQW 8647/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: I have been informed that the announced redundancies at Queen's University apply only to Queen's University staff. Under the proposals for merger, last year the Governing Bodies of both institutions agreed a set of guiding principles for the merger process. The second principle states that, "there will be full consultation with all staff and Trade Unions. Staff will transfer under TUPE with their terms and conditions protected and will remain in their current pension schemes. No compulsory redundancies will arise as a direct result of this merger." Queen's has also separately stated to me that there will be no compulsory redundancies arising from its recently approved 2009 Academic Plan.

Portrush Catering College Buildings

Mr A McQuillan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning (i) to outline the plans for the buildings previously used as the catering college in Portrush; and (ii) if these buildings could be used as temporary accommodation for new businesses which have not yet secured premises. (AQW 8653/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The site and buildings of the former catering college at Portrush are owned by the University of Ulster. The university has advised me that these are now surplus to its requirements and that planning permission for residential use has been obtained. It is proposed that the site will be offered for sale at an appropriate time with all proceeds being reinvested in the University's core business.

The site has already been decommissioned, including the removal of some core services. To reduce security and health and safety risks, and associated costs, the University proposes to demolish the buildings. Any proposed use of the buildings for business purposes would require a new application to the Planning Service for change of use approval.

Qualifications of the Working Age Population

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline the percentage of the working age population qualified to Level 2 and Level 3 and above compared to 2004. (AQW 8655/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: Latest Labour Force Survey (LFS) estimates for Quarter 1 2009 show that 65.7% of the working age population were qualified to National Qualification Framework (NQF) level 2 or above, while 48.6% were qualified to level 3 or above. This compares with LFS estimates for Quarter 2 2004¹, which showed 62.2% of the working age population qualified to NQF level 2 or above and 45.2% qualified to level 3 or above.

¹ Estimates for Quarter 1 2004 are not available, so Q2 2004 was chosen as the closest comparative estimate.

STEM Subjects

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline (i) progress against the PfG goal of increasing the number of students by 25%, especially those from disadvantaged communities, at graduate and postgraduate level studying STEM subjects; (ii) what specific actions are being undertaken to identify and target those groups; and (iii) how success is being measured. (AQW 8656/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning:

- (i) The target date for the achievement of this goal is 2015. The numbers studying STEM subjects at graduate and postgraduate level have remained broadly consistent, in excess of 20,700, for the years 06/07 and 07/08.

The participation rate of students from the lowest socio-economic groups studying STEM subjects has also remained constant at 26%.

- (ii) The University of Ulster's Step-Up programme, which is funded by this Department, specifically targets schools in disadvantaged communities in Belfast and Londonderry. It has been very successful in supporting pupils through the Double Award Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education in science and in progressing them to study across a broad range of STEM subjects at university. The Department is also developing a Widening Participation Strategy which will examine participation in Higher Education, by those from disadvantaged communities, across a range of areas, including STEM. In addition, my Department, and the

Department of Education, are working closely to consider the report of the independent review of STEM policy in Northern Ireland.

- (iii) The Department will continue to monitor and report on enrolments, at graduate and postgraduate level, to STEM subjects on an annual basis.

Foreign Workers

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the importance of foreign workers in delivering the objectives of his Department and its partner organisations. (AQW 8658/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The aim of the Department for Employment and Learning is to promote learning and skills, to prepare people for work and to support the economy. The Department has commissioned Oxford Economics to carry out research into the Economic, Labour Market and Skills Impacts of Migrant Workers in Northern Ireland, and findings are due to be published in the autumn. There was a substantial increase in in-migration to Northern Ireland following the accession of 10 new member states to the European Union in 2004: this was accompanied in the period until early 2008 by rising employment and average wages and falling unemployment. This suggests that migrant workers have made a generally positive contribution to the economy. The research will enable us to determine this with greater certainty and also throw light on the position in terms of the recent economic downturn.

Student Complaints

Mr P Butler asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what steps they have taken to establish an independent complaints body to address complaints from students in higher and further education.

(AQW 8722/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: This Department considered various options on the independent adjudication of student complaints in 2004. At that time the preferred option was to extend the jurisdiction of the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Complaints to include student complaints. A review of the Offices of the Assembly Ombudsman and Commissioner for Complaints in 2004 recommended that the Ombudsman could assume responsibility for additional public bodies on the principle of following public funds and it was suggested that this might include universities and further education colleges. The outcome of the review has not been carried forward and this will be raised with OFMdFM.

Recruitment Agencies

Dr A McDonnell asked the Minister for Employment and Learning (i) what plans he has to publish compliance rates from inspections of recruitment agencies (under the 2005 Conduct Regulations) so employers and potential employees can identify compliant and non-compliant agencies; and (ii) for his assessment of the performance of his Department's enforcement policy against agencies in breach of regulations. (AQW 8882/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: My Department is responsible for regulating NI-based employment agencies. Agencies must comply with the Employment (Miscellaneous Provisions) (NI) Order 1981 ("the 1981 Order") and the Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Businesses Regulations (NI) 2005 ("the Conduct Regulations"). The Conduct Regulations are designed to protect work seekers and employers using services provided by an agency and put in place minimum standards for agencies, such as agreeing terms and conditions with work-seekers and hirers and checking identification and qualifications of work-seekers.

DEL currently has two inspectors whose role is to carry out a programme of routine inspections of all NI agencies to check for compliance with the Conduct Regulations. The inspectors also investigate complaints made against agencies. Since October 2007, 130 inspections have been carried out and 66 complaints have been investigated.

In response to the first part of your question, my Department will publish its first Employment Agency Inspectors report in the coming weeks which will provide a detailed review of the work of the inspectors since powers of entry and inspection were granted in January 2006. Subsequent inspectors' reports will be annual. The figures provided will include more detailed statistics on the number of inspections carried out, complaints

received and investigated and a list of the regulations which have been breached most often. These details will be as much as my Department will be permitted to provide regarding compliance rates. Specific findings following inspections cannot be made available as article 7B(10) of the 1981 Order makes it a criminal offence for officers to disclose information found in the course of their duties except in limited circumstances. Therefore, my Department cannot publish any information which identifies compliant or non-compliant agencies.

Regarding the second part of your question, I am very pleased with the performance of my Department's enforcement policy against agencies in breach of regulations. As well as carrying out a programme of routine inspections, my Department's inspectors investigate individual complaints against agencies and ensure that any infringements of the legislation are rectified. Most agencies co-operate with inspectors and rectify any infringements within two weeks. Where necessary, the inspectors carry out follow up inspections to check that infringements have been corrected.

To date, no prosecutions have been taken. However, my Department has recently successfully prohibited one actors' agency from operating for two years and we are currently in the process of bringing another prohibition case before an Industrial Tribunal. Prohibition notices are appropriate in more serious cases where an individual is deemed unsuitable to run an agency. I believe that this shows that my Department's enforcement policy against agencies in breach of regulations has been successful, providing advice and guidance to the majority of agencies who commit minor breaches, while seeking to take appropriate legal action against the few who seriously flaunt the regulations to the detriment of work-seekers, employers and compliant agencies.

I am conscious, however, that as the Department's agency enforcement role develops, it is anticipated that we will need to prosecute some seriously non-compliant agencies in the future. It is important that my Department has a wide range of powers which can be used to adequately deal with these agencies. To address this, I have recently introduced an Employment Bill in the Assembly. Some of the proposals in the Bill include making offences under employment agency legislation triable at the Magistrates' Court (as at present) or the Crown Court, thereby allowing for unlimited fines (currently the maximum fine that can be imposed is £5000) and compelling agencies or third parties such as banks to produce financial information to inspectors when necessary. If passed, these further powers will ensure that my Department will be even more effective in dealing with agencies which breach the regulations.

Educational Maintenance Allowance

Mr M Durkan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, in respect of differential assessment of cohabiting and non-cohabiting parents for Educational Maintenance Allowance claims, if his Department (i) has taken legal advice; or (ii) intends to take such advice, including about its compliance with the statutory equality duties set down in Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. (AQW 8896/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: EMA is a means-tested allowance which uses household income, including child and spousal maintenance, to determine a student's entitlement to EMA. Household income refers to the total income should the student's parents; be they married or cohabiting. A preliminary Equality Impact Assessment, conducted prior to the introduction of the EMA scheme in 2004, did not indicate a potential adverse impact on equality of opportunity for any of the Section 75 groups. As a result, the Department has not, and does not intend to take, legal advice in respect of this matter.

DEPARTMENT OF ENTERPRISE, TRADE AND INVESTMENT

Department of Energy and Climate Change

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what discussions her Department has held with the Department of Energy and Climate Change; and on what issues. (AQW 8618/09)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mrs A Foster): During the period June 2008 to June 2009 three areas of the Department have held discussions or had involvement with the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC).

- i. Energy Division has had contact with DECC, in the form of meetings, telephone conversations and email exchanges on the following areas:
- Internal Market for Energy (IME 3) Directives on electricity and gas
 - EU Regulations relating to the energy industry
 - Security of energy supply
 - Carbon Capture and Storage
 - Additional gas capacity at Twynholm
 - Moffat Exit Reform gas proposals
 - UK Energy Act 2008
 - UK regime for off-shore gas storage and LNG unloading
 - UK Renewables Obligations
 - UK Renewable Energy Strategy
 - Renewable Energy Directive
 - Marine renewables
 - Offshore wind
 - British Irish Council - Energy workstream
 - Bioenergy
 - Energy End Use Efficiency and Energy Services Directive
 - Low Carbon Building Programme
 - Low Carbon Solutions for Communities
- ii. Minerals Branch and the Geological Survey of Northern Ireland have had meetings, telephone conversations and email exchanges on the following issues:
- Minerals & Petroleum Licensing; and
 - Carbon Capture & Storage
- iii. Invest NI has taken part in DECC's Renewable Energy Deployment Forum. This Forum comprises representatives from the UK's Regional Development Agencies along with the UK Trade and Industry and DECC. The Forum has decided that the deployment of Wind and Heat offer the greatest opportunities for the UK and will concentrate its efforts on these areas.

Northern Ireland Tourist Board

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what help, both practical and financial has the Northern Ireland Tourist Board given to promote bus tours visiting Christian heritage sites.

(AQW 8812/09)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The Saint Patrick's Trail was launched in 2006. This 92 mile driving route identified 15 key Christian Heritage sites from Bangor and the Ards Peninsula, to Downpatrick, Newry and Armagh. NITB co-funded the design, production and installation of the 217 (no.) Brown and White tourist signs, which assists vehicle drivers in following the route of the trail.

The Northern Ireland Tourist Board is currently developing a project that will highlight and deliver "100 Great Cultural Days Out" in Northern Ireland. The itineraries will be Culture and Heritage based and will include Christian Heritage sites linked to the Saint Patrick's Trail.

The Northern Ireland Tourist Board is working with the Federation of Passenger Transport Northern Ireland Limited on this initiative. The itineraries will be communicated to the target audience of local bus tour operators by various promotional methods, culminating in a Group Workshop in January 2010. The Federation will secure and deliver the Group Organiser audience for this workshop. Bus tour operators will be provided the opportunity to meet the local tourism trade and in partnership they will be able to develop and deliver tailored group experiences based around the rich Christian Heritage product available in Northern Ireland.

Green New Deal Group

Dr S Farry asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what consideration is being given by her Department to the recommendations of the Green New Deal Group on developing the green economy.

(AQW 8826/09)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: My Department is currently considering the recommendations from the Green New Deal Group report on developing the green economy. Given the cross cutting nature of many of the recommendations however, DETI is seeking views from all Departments represented on the Sustainable Energy Interdepartmental Working Group (SEIDWG) as well as the Economic Opportunities sub group of the SEIDWG.

Invest NI assists and facilitates companies or groups of companies to exploit and create jobs in new green markets and has done much already to make businesses more aware of new low carbon and renewable energy markets that are unfolding globally. To co-ordinate its activities in this area Invest NI is developing a Renewable Energy Strategic Action Plan. The Plan aims to position Northern Ireland as a leading region in renewable energy development. In light of this Invest NI will also be considering the recommendations presented in the Green New Deal proposal and will make a formal response.

I will reply to the Chair of the group in due course when I have fully considered the report and its implications.

County Fermanagh Tourism

Mr P Doherty asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) how many tourists visited County Fermanagh in 2007 and 2008; and (ii) to indicate with approximate figures, the most popular tourist attractions.

(AQW 8855/09)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:

(i) 2008 Tourism figures for County Fermanagh are currently unavailable but will be completed by August 2009.

In 2007 visitor and domestic tourists took 185,400 overnight trips in County Fermanagh, of which 72,900 were taken by out of state visitors (i.e. non Northern Ireland residents) and 112,500 were domestic holiday trips. No information is available on day trips.

(ii) In 2008 the three most popular visitor attractions in County Fermanagh on the basis of visitor figures submitted as part of NITB's Annual Visitor Attraction Survey were as follows:

- a) Belleek Pottery (171,569)
- b) Marble Arch Caves (53,280); and
- c) Enniskillen Castle Museum (40,355)

The three most popular attractions in 2007 were as follows:

- a) Belleek Pottery (141,255)
- b) Marble Arch Caves (54,072); and
- c) Florence Court House and Gardens (30,664).

Broadband Speed

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what is the estimated proportion of households in the (i) Fermanagh District Council; (ii) Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council; (iii) Omagh District Council; and (iv) Strabane District Council areas, which currently have broadband speeds of less than 2Mbps.

(AQW 8893/09)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The detailed information requested is not available. A research report produced by Ofcom, the independent telecommunications regulator, in January 2009 ('UK Broadband Speeds 2008'), estimates that the average broadband speed experienced by consumers in Northern Ireland is 3.5 megabits per second. This report does not distinguish between household and business consumers

nor is the information available at a sub regional level. It is worth noting however that the broadband speeds available to consumers depend on a range of factors and actual take up of the services is a matter of personal choice.

Within the areas mentioned above, DETI is supporting a number of trials under the Northern Ireland Broadband Fund all of which are designed to deliver speeds in excess of 2 Mbps. We await with interest the final outcomes which will indicate the level of consumer uptake of the services being made available.

Broadband Speed

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what is the average broadband speed for a household. (AQW 8894/09)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: My Department does not collect data on broadband speeds. However, a research report produced by Ofcom, the independent telecommunications regulator, in January 2009 ('UK Broadband Speeds 2008'), estimates that the average broadband speed experienced by consumers in Northern Ireland is 3.5 megabits per second. The report does not distinguish between household and business consumers.

Debt Advisory Services

Mr M Durkan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment in light of the Assembly resolution on 16 March 2009 calling for a package of measures designed to enhance existing debt-advisory services (i) what plans her Department has to deliver personal debt advisory services from April 2011; and (ii) when any related projects and programmes will be put to tender. (AQW 8897/09)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: My Department plans to undertake an evaluation of the current and planned expansion of debt advice services which it funds, and to consult with a wide range of stakeholders both within and outside Government about future arrangements for debt advice provision, in sufficient time before the end of March 2011.

I am keen that, if there is a demonstrable need, people in debt in Northern Ireland should continue to be able to access an appropriate high quality personal debt advice service from April 2011.

Any such plans will however be subject to Executive agreement to appropriate funding continuing to be made available; and it is too early to predict the tender dates for any debt advice projects or programmes which my Department may propose to put in place.

DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT

Nutts Corner Motorsports Centre

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of the Environment what assessment his Department has made of noise pollution at the Nutts Corner Motorsports Centre; and to detail how often officials from his Department monitor noise levels at the site. (AQW 8662/09)

Minister of the Environment (Mr S Wilson): The Department does not carry out any assessment of noise at the Nutts Corner Motorsports Centre. Noise nuisance from the Centre is dealt with either by Antrim Borough Council or Lisburn City Council depending on where the noise complainant resides. The Pollution Control and Local Government (NI) Order 1978 provides the powers to Councils to investigate such incidents.

The Department does however record the number of noise complaints that all twenty six councils receive. These are published by the Department annually in the form of the Noise Complaint Statistics for Northern Ireland report.

Renewable Energy

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of the Environment if he is aware that the consultants who drew up the Supplementary Guidelines to PPS18 Renewable Energy have done a number of reports for groups who are opposed to wind turbines; and have written a significant number of reports which speak out against building wind turbines. (AQW 8681/09)

Minister of the Environment: I was not involved in the process and I am not personally aware of the previous work carried out by the consultants. My officials are satisfied however that the most appropriate consultants were selected from amongst those who tendered. The consultants signed a declaration that they had no conflict of interest.

Renewable Energy

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the experience Julie Martin Associates, the group appointed to draw up Supplementary Guidelines to PPS18 Renewable Energy, had in providing this guidance. (AQW 8682/09)

Minister of the Environment: I understand Julie Martin Associates clearly demonstrated an excellent range of previous relevant experience across the UK and Ireland. This experience includes, amongst other things, landscape character assessment and visual impact assessments, of wind energy developments in the landscape. The individuals in her team have, between them, many years experience in landscape and environmental planning, ecology, archaeology and digital mapping.

Taxis Bill

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the implementation of the Taxis Bill. (AQW 8685/09)

Minister of the Environment: When the Taxis Act was enacted it was envisaged that a programme of taxi reform would be implemented progressively over a three to five year period, as resources permitted, and that remains the intention. The first Commencement Order under the Taxis Act is expected to be made by October 2008. That will enable the PSNI and the Driver & Vehicle Agency to enforce taxi legislation on Belfast Harbour Commissioners land including major locations for taxis such as Belfast City Airport. My officials have been meeting with stakeholders to make them aware of the proposed changes and to help them ensure that they comply with the new requirements. Over the past year progress has also been made on some of the measures necessary to underpin future plans. For example, officials have been developing a specification for the taximeters that all taxis will have to be fitted with in due course. That will help taxi operators and drivers who wish to buy taximeters now or who want to plan ahead for the new regime. We have also developed a suite of relevant fixed penalty offences for inclusion in the current consultation on a fixed penalty and deposit scheme, and it is intended that these will be in place by March 2010. Preliminary discussions have been held about the review of taxi fares that is scheduled to start in 2010. Significant progress has also been made towards increasing the resources devoted to taxi enforcement, with a view to ensuring that changes to the regulatory regime can in due course be implemented effectively on the ground. Plans are also being developed for the introduction by the end of this year of an operator registration scheme, with a view to moving progressively to full operator licensing by 2013. In terms of related developments, a temporary exemption scheme for nursery transport providers has been put in place, a review has been initiated of courtesy and incidental transport, and options for licensing or exempting vehicles such as American-style stretched limousines, wedding cars, funeral cars and tuctucs (motorised rickshaws) are being considered.

Illegal Taxis

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of the Environment what efforts are being made to clamp down on illegal taxis throughout Northern Ireland. (AQW 8737/09)

Minister of the Environment: Since April 2003 the Driver & Vehicle Agency taxi enforcement officers have worked closely with the PSNI to target illegal taxis. During that period DVA enforcement officers working in

conjunction with PSNI have carried out intelligence led enforcement operations throughout the province, during these operations (both overt and covert) a total of 15,632 taxis and drivers have been checked, resulting in 1,293 drivers being reported for prosecution. To date fines of £199,384 have been imposed and 2,073 penalty points awarded, with 53 drivers being disqualified from driving. In addition 298 commercial radio sets have been seized from unlicensed vehicles.

As a result of a comprehensive spending review (CSR2) the Agency have secured additional funding to recruit additional enforcement officers, this will enable the Agency to increase the number of taxi enforcement officers from its current level of 6 to 18 over the next 2 to 3 years. An additional Taxi enforcement team will be established in the North West within the next 6 months. The Taxis Act will enhance the regulatory framework for taxis, and give enforcement officers powers to seize unlicensed taxis. It is anticipated that during 2010 DVA enforcement officers will have the power to issue fixed penalty tickets and these additional powers will be a major deterrent to illegal operators.

The DVA will continue to target illegal taxi operators with the aim of improving road safety and ensuring fair competition within the taxi industry.

Illegal Taxis

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of the Environment how many prosecutions have been secured against illegal taxi operators, in each of the past three years. (AQW 8738/09)

Minister of the Environment: The number of convictions and penalties imposed for each of the past 3 years are as follows:

2006-2007

- Drivers convicted 72 Total fines £20,320 Penalty points awarded 201

2007-2008

- Drivers convicted 108 Total Fines £24,780 Penalty points awarded 228

*2008-2009

- Drivers convicted 38 Total fines £4,625 Penalty points awarded 56.

* Due to the time taken for a prosecution to be processed through the Court system a considerable number of cases are still pending for this period.

Illegal Taxis

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of the Environment how many enforcement officers are operating in Belfast to clamp down on illegal taxis. (AQW 8739/09)

Minister of the Environment: The Driver & Vehicle Agency currently employ 18 enforcement officers, 6 enforcement officers are dedicated to taxi (PSV) enforcement duties and are assisted on a regular basis by members of the goods vehicle enforcement team. The team carries out intelligence led enforcement operations throughout the province in conjunction with PSNI. During the period 1 April 2006 to 31 March 2009 DVA enforcement staff carried out 418 taxi enforcement operations and checked some 7,348 vehicles. Of the 418 enforcement operations 137 were carried in the Belfast area resulting in 268 drivers being reported with a view to prosecution for a range of offences including 124 vehicles with no Public Service Vehicle Licence and 135 drivers with no Public Service Vehicle insurance, 72 vehicles were issued with immediate prohibition notices for serious mechanical defects.

Plans are at an advanced stage to establish a Taxi Enforcement Team within the North West within the next 6 months which will free up the existing team based in Belfast to work more regularly within Belfast and surrounding towns.

Northern Ireland Environment Agency

Mr A Bresland asked the Minister of the Environment in relation to planning application K/2005/2136/F (i) why it has taken the Northern Ireland Environment Agency over three months to respond to the Planning Service; and (ii) when the Planning Service can expect a response. (AQW 8752/09)

Minister of the Environment: The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) apologises for the delay in processing this application and any inconvenience this may have caused.

The application is for a residential development on a site which includes part of a former landfill site and as such the potential exists for serious risks to be present to both human health and environmental receptors. In undertaking its role as consultee to Planning Service, NIEA needs to evaluate the information and provide advice to Planning Service on the assessment of risks and the proposed remediation strategy to ensure the site would be / can be made suitable for its proposed residential end-use.

In this instance given the highly elevated levels of ground gas (up to 80% methane) detected, NIEA has been liaising closely with colleagues at Omagh District Council in agreeing an appropriate strategy to manage the risks on the site.

Due to the nature of the site and the risks identified, this application has now been the subject of 4 planning consultations.

It is anticipated that a response will be issued to Planning Service by 3 July 2009.

Planning Applications

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of planning applications in each divisional planning office that have been determined under the draft planning policy statement 21 in the categories of (i) farm dwellings; (ii) replacement dwellings; and (iii) farm buildings or other conversions to a dwelling. (AQW 8770/09)

Minister of the Environment: Following the publication of draft PPS 21 on 25th November 2008, my Department has determined 1145 planning applications for single dwellings in the rural area and 633 planning applications for replacement dwellings in the rural area between this date and 31st March 2009. This is broken down by Divisional Planning Office as follows:

Division	Application Type	Approval	Refusal	Total
Ballymena	Single Dwelling	171	6	177
	Replacement Dwelling	111	0	111
Belfast	Single Dwelling	2	0	2
	Replacement Dwelling	8	0	8
Craigavon	Single Dwelling	240	4	244
	Replacement Dwelling	193	0	193
Downpatrick	Single Dwelling	67	3	70
	Replacement Dwelling	93	0	93
Londonderry	Single Dwelling	167	1	168
	Replacement Dwelling	87	0	87
Omagh	Single Dwelling	474	10	484
	Replacement Dwelling	140	1	141
TOTAL	Single Dwelling	1121	24	1145
	Replacement Dwelling	632	1	633

My Department does not record the level of detail on the current system of electronic data retrieval – 20/20 - to provide accurate figures for applications determined for farm buildings or other conversions to a dwelling. The information requested can only be provided by carrying out a manual search of all our existing files and would not be available in the time specified and would incur disproportionate costs.

The next Development Management quarterly statistics are due for publication in September 2009. These figures will include applications assessed under draft PPS 21 between April 2009 and June 2009.

Colin Valley Golf Facilities

Mr P Butler asked the Minister of the Environment what steps he is taking to provide Colin Glen Trust with a 99-year lease as part of its plans to develop the existing Colin Valley Golf facilities. (AQW 8783/09)

Minister of the Environment: My predecessor Sammy Wilson, met representatives of Colin Glen Trust on 25 June 2009 on this issue and explained the difficulties for the Department associated with a 99-year lease. He proposed instead a 25-year lease which would include an undertaking by the Department to renew on a recurring basis provided the terms of the lease had been met and the Trust wished to renew, and suggested that NIEA send a letter to the Trust confirming its willingness to enter into such a lease. This letter has since issued.

Colin Valley Golf Facilities

Mr P Butler asked the Minister of the Environment what steps his Department is taking to help Colin Glen Trust develop its proposals for the (i) golf academy centre; (ii) floodlit driving range; (iii) golf teaching facilities and (iv) golf course, at its centre at Black's Road, Belfast. (AQW 8784/09)

Minister of the Environment: My reply to AQW 8783/09 explained that my predecessor Sammy Wilson, had proposed a 25-year lease with an undertaking by the Department to renew on a recurring basis rather than a 99-year lease. Other than issuing a letter confirming this and arranging the 25-year lease it would be inappropriate for the Department to provide further help to a commercial undertaking. The Department however recognises the valuable contribution made by the Trust to the social fabric of south west Belfast and will, as far as possible, facilitate Colin Glen Trust in continuing to provide this service.

Litter and Dog Foul Fines

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister of the Environment how much has been raised through fixed penalty in (i) litter fines; and (ii) fine for failing to clean up dog foul, in each Council area in the past 12 months. (AQW 8890/09)

Minister of the Environment: The number of fines paid and the revenue collected to date through fixed penalty fines per Council area for litter offences and dog fouling are set out in the table below. The Litter (Northern Ireland) Order 1994, as amended, specifies the amount of the fixed penalty for litter offences as £50. The Dogs (Northern Ireland) Act 1983 specifies the amount of the fixed penalty for dog fouling as £50. This information relates to the 2008/09 year.

Council	No of litter offence fines paid	Revenue from paid litter fines	No of dog fouling fines paid	Revenue from paid dog fouling fines
Antrim BC	21	1050	0	0
Ards BC	9	450	10	500
Armagh City & DC	8	400	3	150
Ballymena BC	53	2650	3	150
Ballymoney BC	14	700	0	0
Banbridge DC	9	450	1	50
Belfast CC	864	43,200	91	4550
Carrickfergus BC	23	1150	3	150
Castlereagh BC	39	1950	1	50
Coleraine BC	29	1450	37	1850
Cookstown DC	27	1350	1	50

Council	No of litter offence fines paid	Revenue from paid litter fines	No of dog fouling fines paid	Revenue from paid dog fouling fines
Craigavon BC	427	21,350	46	2300
Derry DC	6	300	1	50
Down DC	36	1800	6	300
Dungannon & South Tyrone BC	0	0	0	0
Fermanagh DC	17	850	0	0
Larne BC	55	2750	11	550
Limavady BC	4	200	0	0
Lisburn CC	8	400	1	50
Magherafelt DC	14	700	1	50
Moyle DC	5	250	2	100
Newry & Mourne DC	43	2150	1	50
Newtownabbey BC	120	6000	21	1050
North Down BC	16	800	2	100
Omagh DC	18	900	4	200
Strabane DC	0	0	0	0

Road Tax

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister of the Environment how many vehicles without road tax has the Driver and Vehicle Agency detected in each of the past five years. (AQW 8892/09)

Minister of the Environment: Reports of vehicles for alleged offences of road tax evasion are obtained from DVA's Automatic Number Plate Readers (ANPR) system and wheel clamping units and are augmented by reports received from the PSNI and Parking Attendants working on behalf of DRD.

The number of unlicensed vehicles detected in the past five years are:

2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
17,815	25,845	22,674	26,837	21,873

PPS21

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment how many applications have been lodged, per constituency, to take advantage of the changes in planning regulations under PPS21. (AQW 8966/09)

Minister of the Environment: Following publication of draft PPS 21 on 25th November 2008, my Department has received 1130 planning applications for single dwellings in the rural area and 517 planning applications for replacement dwellings in the rural area between this date and 31st March 2009. This is broken down by constituency as follows:

Constituency Area	Single Dwelling	Replacement Dwelling	Total
Belfast East	1	0	1
Belfast North	0	2	2
Belfast West	1	1	2
East Antrim	17	10	27

Constituency Area	Single Dwelling	Replacement Dwelling	Total
East Londonderry	62	27	89
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	189	57	246
Foyle	24	12	36
Lagan Valley	40	34	74
Mid Ulster	145	54	199
Newry & Armagh	120	44	164
North Antrim	129	53	182
North Down	4	5	9
South Antrim	51	31	82
South Down	133	86	219
Strangford	25	32	57
Upper Bann	33	22	55
West Tyrone	156	47	203
Total	1130	517	1647

My Department does not record the level of detail on the current system of electronic data retrieval – 20/20 to provide accurate figures for all other applications submitted as a result of the publication of draft PPS21. The systems allows to retrieve accurate data for single and replacement dwellings in the rural area however, information on other categories of development in the rural area can only be provided by carrying out a manual search of all our existing files and would not be available in the time specified and would incur disproportionate costs.

The next Development Management quarterly statistics are due for publication in September 2009. These figures will include those applications submitted to my Department between April 2009 and June 2009.

Ulster Farm By-Products

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of the Environment to detail any recent investigations conducted by his Department in relation to (i) air pollution; and (ii) water pollution emanating from Ulster Farm By-Products in Glenavy. (AQW 8997/09)

Minister of the Environment:

- (i) The Northern Ireland Environment Agency has continued to investigate complaints of odour from the site. In general the main cause is thought to be related to the dispersion of odour from the thermal oxidiser stacks. The company proposes to install a higher stack to improve dispersion of the abated odours. Planning permission is required and an application is currently with the Planning Service.
- (ii) There have been no reported water pollution incidents.

Taxi Act 2008

Dr A McDonnell asked the Minister of the Environment (i) why the Taxi Act 2008 has not been implemented; (ii) the reasons for the delay in implementation; and (iii) when the DVLA will commence implementation. (AQW 9005/09)

Minister of the Environment: When the Taxis Act was enacted it was envisaged that a programme of taxi reform would be implemented progressively over a three to five year period, as resources permitted, and that remains the intention. The first Commencement Order under the Taxis Act is expected to be made by October 2009. That will enable the PSNI and the Driver & Vehicle Agency to enforce taxi legislation on Belfast Harbour Commissioners land including major locations for taxis such as Belfast City Airport. My officials have been meeting with stakeholders to make them aware of the proposed changes and to help them ensure that they comply

with the new requirements. Over the past year progress has also been made on some of the measures necessary to underpin future plans. For example, officials have been developing a specification for the taximeters that all taxis will have to be fitted with in due course. That will help taxi operators and drivers who wish to buy taximeters now or who want to plan ahead for the new regime. We have also developed a suite of relevant fixed penalty offences for inclusion in the current consultation on a fixed penalty and deposit scheme, and it is intended that these will be in place by March 2010. Preliminary discussions have been held about the review of taxi fares that is scheduled to start in 2010. Significant progress has also been made towards increasing the resources devoted to taxi enforcement, with a view to ensuring that changes to the regulatory regime can in due course be implemented effectively on the ground. Plans are also being developed for the introduction by the end of this year of an operator registration scheme, with a view to moving progressively to full operator licensing by 2013. In terms of related developments, a temporary exemption scheme for nursery transport providers has been put in place, a review has been initiated of courtesy and incidental transport, and options for licensing or exempting vehicles such as American-style stretched limousines, wedding cars, funeral cars and tuctucs (motorised rickshaws) are being considered.

Driving Licences

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister of the Environment what the targets and timescales are for processing (i) driving licence applications; and (ii) driving licence renewals. (AQW 9013/09)

Minister of the Environment: The Driver & Vehicle Agency (DVA) target for driving licence applications is to dispatch 95% of applications within 10 working days of receipt of the application. This target includes applications for first licences and renewal of expired licences. Some applications, such as those involving medical enquiries which require further information or the production of specialist medical reports, may take longer to process.

The Agency website (www.dvani.gov.uk) provides information updated daily about actual processing times for applications received.

DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

Holocaust Education Trust

Mr M Durkan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to indicate (i) what monies have been received in the Northern Ireland block as a “Barnett consequential” in respect of the UK Government’s funding for the Holocaust Education Trust; (ii) where this money is in the budget; and (iii) how it will be used. (AQW 8578/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr N Dodds): Since the 2007 Comprehensive Spending Review outcome was announced in October 2007, the Northern Ireland Executive has not received any Barnett consequentials in respect of the Holocaust Education Trust.

Barnett consequentials are incorporated into the overall level of funding available to the Executive rather than being allocated to specific spending areas.

Civil Service

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) the number of civil servants who have taken career breaks in each of the last five years and (ii) the average duration of these career breaks. (AQW 8633/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The information requested is provided in the table below. The overall figures presented include NI government departments and their Executive Agencies.

Year	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	Total
Number of Civil Servants who commenced Career Breaks	167	199	253	275	211	1105

The average duration a person spent on career breaks was 754 days.

Main Estimates and Budget Bill

Mr R Beggs asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel why he was absent during the Main Estimates and Budget Bill debates on the floor of the Assembly on 15 and 16 June 2009. (AQW 8652/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: I was not the Minister of Finance and Personnel at this time and I am not in a position to comment on my predecessor's diary arrangements.

Peace III Funding

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what assistance is available to people within unionist communities and areas who wish to apply for Peace III funding. (AQW 8668/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Applications to the PEACE III Programme are encouraged from all communities and geographical areas, and the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB), PEACE III Managing Authority, provides guidance and support to any organisation wishing to apply.

Independent research has shown both communities to be benefiting significantly from EU PEACE funding. However, there is evidence that the Protestant community is slightly under-represented among funding applicants.

SEUPB has engaged directly with Protestant communities to encourage applications. Actions here have included road shows, meetings with community and other civil society organisations, provision of information and advice, and provision of developmental support in preparation of applications. SEUPB has also taken forward needs assessments within Protestant communities and regularly engaged with elected representatives.

Background Note

1. Relative shares of EU PEACE funding awarded to the Protestant and Catholic communities have previously attracted political and public interest, with Protestant uptake of funding perceived to be low.
2. Independent research on the first PEACE Programme estimated the Protestant community's share in Northern Ireland at 44 per cent, with a corresponding Catholic share of 56 per cent. Similar research published in 2007 on PEACE II estimated the Protestant share at 47 per cent, with a Catholic share of 53 per cent.
3. Based on these estimates, both communities appear to be benefiting significantly from EU PEACE funding. The relatively higher Catholic share is attributed by the researchers to higher levels of deprivation in the Catholic community (i.e. an outworking of the programme's Targeting Social Need principle) and to lower application rates in the Protestant community.
4. SEUPB has consistently worked to promote the availability of PEACE funding to all communities and to encourage applications from all. SEUPB promote the PEACE III Programme throughout the eligible area, and all communities are strongly encouraged to apply. The overall aim of the PEACE III Programme is 'To reinforce progress towards a peaceful and stable society and to promote reconciliation'.
5. SEUPB is actively engaged in exploring with and advising those sections of the community who have previously felt under-represented how they can best access the Themes within PEACE III. SEUPB has taken forward a number of initiatives to engage with the Unionist community, including:
 - Phoenix Group (former members of the security forces) – needs analysis report recently completed and launched. Application to the Programme submitted and under assessment.
 - Business in the Community (BITC) / Stratagem – needs analysis for hard to reach Protestant communities and housing estates, in selected geographic areas throughout Northern Ireland under way.

- Meetings with office bearers of Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland and Co Armagh Orange districts – application in preparation for cultural and interpretation centre.
 - Meeting with Apprentice Boys of Derry – to increase awareness of EU Programmes.
 - Meeting with wide ranging representatives of different Orange institutions and affiliate organisations in West Belfast Orange Hall – to increase awareness of EU Programmes.
 - On-going meetings meeting with Rev Mervyn Gibson (Jennymount Methodist Church) – to discuss possibility of funding a cross-community centre in Tigers Bay/New lodge area.
 - Local PEACE action plans – each has the capacity to impact on protestant/unionist/loyalist areas.
 - Series of roadshows undertaken by SEUPB to engage with all communities across the eligible region.
 - Letter of Offer issued to the SKAINOS project in East Belfast under the auspices of East Belfast Mission to the value of £6,125,831.
 - Meeting with Glenn Barr to discuss possible Messines project.
6. No shares of EU PEACE funding may be set aside for either community. PEACE III funding is allocated by selection panels on the basis of selection criteria that reflect the PEACE III Programme's agreed aims and objectives. The criteria were approved by the Executive and the PEACE III Programme Monitoring Committee.
- Drafted by Steve Clements – 30 June 2009
 - Cleared by Martin Tyrrell – 30 June 2009

Copy Distribution List:

- Leo O'Reilly
- Richard Pengelly
- Wallace Thompson
- Bill Pauley
- Steve Clements

Accounting Procedures

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, given that the total amount paid in non-consolidated bonus payments to Senior Civil Servants for 2008/09 in each Department is not yet available, to detail the common practices for accounting procedures for all departments and the oversight mechanism to ensure that these are consistent. (AQW 8675/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The Financial Reporting Manual, published by HM Treasury under the oversight of the Financial Reporting Advisory Board, sets out the common accounting and disclosure requirements for the annual report and accounts of government departments, executive agencies, NDPBs, trading funds and major health bodies. This manual requires the preparation of a remuneration report in line with the requirements of the Companies Act for private sector companies. Certain of the information contained in this is subject to audit and will be referred to in the audit opinion and the audit report will also note that the other information will be read by the auditor who will consider whether it is consistent with the financial statements.

Government Cars

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 8234/09 (i) why the criteria referred to were selected; (ii) who decided on these criteria; and (iii) were any other suggested criteria rejected. (AQW 8706/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The criteria were determined to be the most appropriate in order to identify the most economically advantageous tender and meet the needs of the Department of Finance and Personnel.

The Department of Finance and Personnel decided the criteria.

No other suggested criteria were rejected.

Government Cars

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 8234/09, why no sustainable, green or low fuel consumption scores are among the criteria for the purchase of Ministerial cars. (AQW 8707/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: A requirement for CO2 emissions to be no more than 175g/km was included in the specification.

Government Cars

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel (i) how the specification referred to in AQW 8234/09 was arrived at; (ii) what exactly it contained; and (iii) who decided on the specification. (AQW 8708/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The specification was arrived at via a process of analysis of various makes and models in order to provide a final specification that both allowed market competition and met expected user requirements.

A copy of the specification as advertised in May 2007 is included in the attached Annex.

The Department of Finance and Personnel decided the final specification.

Annex

Vehicle Specification

Body Style

- 4 Door Saloon

Exterior features

- Body colour front and rear bumpers
- Body colour door mirrors and handles
- Must have full size matching alloy spare wheel

Engine

- 140 bhp minimum

Transmission

- Automatic, Manual or Hybrid/CTV

Safety

- Driver and front passenger airbags
- Driver and front passenger side airbags
- Anti-lock Brake System (ABS – or equivalent)
- Anti-Slip Regulation (ASR or equivalent)
- Pre-tensioning front seat belts
- Height adjustable front seat belts
- Reversing sensor
- Side impact protective padding
- Door, boot and bonnet open warning
- Fuel filler cap-off warning light

Security

- Vehicle Immobiliser
- Internally operated central locking
- Key in ignition warning alarm
- Deadlocks
- Boot opening isolator

Comfort / Convenience

- Multifunction remote control central locking for doors, and boot
- Electric front and rear windows
- Electric folding door mirrors
- Steering wheel adjustable for both reach and height
- Cruise control
- Remote boot opening

In-car communication

- Audio system – as a minimum, AM/FM radio with Compact Disc Player
- Satellite navigation

Heating and ventilation

- Air conditioning with climate control and separate driver/passenger controls

Rear passenger foot well heating vents

- Pollen filter and odour reducing charcoal filter or equivalent

Interior features

- Full black leather upholstery
- Front and rear courtesy and map reading lights
- Fully trimmed boot compartment
- Boot lights
- Carpet mats

Interior dimensions in millimetres

- Boot length from rear of back seat minimum: 1,000
- Boot width minimum: 950
- Boot height minimum: 450
- Height from front seat base to ceiling minimum: 950
- Width from front driver door to front passenger door minimum: 1350
- Width from rear of front seat to rear back seat minimum: 900
- Height from rear seat base to ceiling minimum: 950

Exterior lighting and visibility

- Xenon headlights with Headlights Wash
- Front and twin rear fog lights
- Lights on warning alarm
- Electrically operated and heated door mirrors
- Heated rear window with time cut off
- Automatic rain sensing front wipers
- High level third brake light

Seating

- Three rear adjustable head restraints
- Electrically operated driver and front passenger seat

Environmental Considerations

- CO2 emissions should be no more than 175 g/km

The supplier should specify characteristics of the vehicle offered relating to measures to address environmental considerations e.g. fuel/exhaust emissions, re-cyclability of components etc.

Servicing

Service of vehicles to be in line with manufacturers requirements. Please provide full details of services, including costs.

A temporary replacement vehicle of equivalent or better standard should also be made available during servicing of a vehicle.

Warranty

Three years warranty and/or 100,000 miles (including all parts, labour and replacement vehicle of equivalent or better standard) and breakdown recovery service.

Delivery

Delivery of vehicles should be to Stormont Castle Cottages, Stormont Estate. From receipt of an official order, delivery of vehicle/s should be no later than four weeks. Please provide details of delivery timescales.

Buy-back Scheme

Suppliers should provide a buy-back price within their offer which is based on the return vehicle being three years old of average condition with approximately 100,000miles usage.

Legislation

The vehicle shall in all respects conform to the requirements of the relevant Northern Ireland legislation, e.g. Motor Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations and relevant European Union legislation. The supplier is responsible for the registration of the vehicle, quoting the tax class as Crown Exempt. The Purchaser must be given legible photocopies of all documentation. The original forms must be signed by the Department's representative. Failure to comply with the above may result in late or non-payment of invoices.

Government Cars

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel (i) when the next tendering process for the supply of cars for the Ministerial fleet will begin; (ii) when the details of the process, the criteria and the scoring of the criteria will be made public; and (iii) how they will be made public. (AQW 8709/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The Department currently intends to commence the tendering process for the supply of cars for the Ministerial fleet in advance of the expiry of the existing contract which is scheduled to terminate at the end of the agreed 3 year warranty arrangements in June 2010.

The process, criteria and scoring methodology will be published within the tender documentation when the requirement is advertised.

The invitation to tender process, criteria and scoring of the criteria will be published in accordance with Northern Ireland (NI) Procurement Policy and the Public Contracts Regulations 2006. All tender documents can be obtained electronically for registered users of Central Procurement Directorate's e-sourcing system, e-sourcing NI.

Government Cars

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 8234/09, why delivery time as a criterion was scored so highly, at 40% of the total potential score; and what were the details of the delivery times offered in the winning bid and for all the other unsuccessful bids. (AQW 8723/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The weighting applied to the criterion was reflective of the requirement to have the replacement cars available as soon as possible for Ministerial use.

Delivery Times Offered for all Bids are:

Supplier	(Winning Tender)	Tender 2	Tender 3	Tender 4	Tender 5	Tender 6	Tender 7	Tender 8
Delivery Times (working days)	15 days	42 days	21 days	50 days	40 days	30 days	30 days	45 days

Lurgan and Craigavon Leisure Centres

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 7974/09, to outline the reason why Craigavon Borough Council was unable to proceed with the projects to install biomass boilers at Lurgan and Craigavon leisure centres, given the Department's assessment that these investments could have delivered savings financially and on carbon emissions. (AQW 8732/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Craigavon Borough Council advised the Department in February 2008 that it would be unable to complete the two biomass boiler projects due to legal issues within the Council that arose during the tendering process. The Department accepted this explanation and deemed the legal issues to be an internal matter for the Council to resolve.

In accepting the grant offer in 2007, the Council was aware that the deadline to complete the projects and claim the grants from the Department was 31 March 2008. Unfortunately it was not possible for the Council to resolve the legal issues and complete the projects by this deadline.

Lurgan and Craigavon Leisure Centres

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 7975/09, (i) to explain the nature of the legal issues that arose during the tendering process; and (ii) to outline why these issues were not resolved, to prevent the financial loss of £161,000 to the Council. (AQW 8734/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Craigavon Borough Council advised the Department in February 2008 that legal issues had arisen in the tendering process that prevented the award of a contract for two biomass boiler projects. This explanation was accepted by the Department and further clarification was not sought as it was deemed an internal matter for the Council. As the issues could not be resolved by the Council by the deadline of 31 March 2008 to complete the project and claim the grant, the Council advised they would be unable to claim the funding on this occasion.

Non-domestic Regional Rate.

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many companies benefited from the freeze in the non-domestic regional rate. (AQW 8805/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: There are 62,000 business ratepayers who are benefiting from the non-domestic regional rates freeze.

It is not possible to break this figure down to identify the number of companies, partnerships, sole traders and other organisations, nor is it possible to differentiate between those undertakings in the private, voluntary and public sectors.

Industrial Rates

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many companies benefited from the cap in industrial rates. (AQW 8806/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Currently 4,760 properties occupied and used for manufacturing purposes are entitled to industrial derating.

It is not possible to differentiate between companies, sole traders and partnerships and therefore this figure represents the number of businesses in Northern Ireland that benefit.

Green New Deal Group

Dr S Farry asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what consideration is being given by his Department to the financial aspects of the recommendations of the Green New Deal Group on developing the green economy in relation to future spending decisions. (AQW 8837/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: It is for the respective departments involved in the delivery of the services specified in this report to determine the financial implications of the recommendations from the Green New Deal Group.

In addition, there is insufficient detail presented within the report to allow a full and comprehensive analysis of the financial aspects of the recommendations in relation to the Executive's overall spending plans for 2010-11 and beyond.

Central Procurement Directorate

Mr M Durkan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel if he intends to review Central Procurement Directorate involvement in a number of tender processes which have selected A4e for public sector contracts where concerns about the companies capacity or experience have subsequently emerged. (AQW 8901/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: CPD is responsible for managing public procurement processes in accordance with relevant regulation, policy and best practice. CPD acts as a facilitator and a repository of specialist procurement knowledge. When it becomes involved in a procurement exercise for Supplies and Services it advises public bodies and acts on their behalf and it does not take decisions in its own right on any matter central to the procurement exercise. The selection criteria in respect of capacity or relevant experience for each procurement exercise is set by the department concerned and is assessed by representatives of that department. Therefore, any questions regarding the selection of specific contractors need to be directed to the department concerned.

Civil Service Equal Pay

Mr D McNarry asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the status of the money set aside by HM Treasury to deal with the NI Civil Service equal pay claim. (AQW 8917/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The facility negotiated with the Prime Minister to cover costs pressures facing the Executive is a combination of advancing some capital expenditure and increased borrowing powers. It will also be possible, on an exceptional basis, to switch any sums used to current expenditure. The Executive has not yet used any of the facility.

Civil Service Equal Pay

Mr D McNarry asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the amount of money set aside by HM Treasury to deal with the NI Civil Service equal pay claim and other contingencies. (AQW 8918/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Apart from a facility for access to up to £100 million which was negotiated with the Prime Minister by the previous Finance Minister, I am not aware of what amount of money, if any, that the Treasury may have set aside to deal with the Civil Service equal pay claims or any other cost pressures facing the Executive.

Efficiency Savings

Mr D McNarry asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to give details of any discussions he has had with HM Treasury about efficiency savings before and after 2011. (AQW 8920/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: In the period since my appointment as Minister for the Department of Finance and Personnel on 1 July 2009 I have not had discussions with HM Treasury regarding efficiency savings.

It is a matter for the Northern Ireland Executive to determine the level and nature of efficiency savings required from Northern Ireland departments.

Budget 2008/09

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the size of the budget in 2008/09.

(AQW 8975/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The most recent information available regarding the level of public expenditure by Northern Ireland departments in 2008-09 is in relation to the Provisional Outturn position, which I reported to the Assembly on 7 July 2009.

These figures indicate that expenditure by Northern Ireland departments was £8.6 billion in terms of current expenditure in 2008-09 and £1.5 billion in respect of net capital investment.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY

Brangam and Bagnall

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to list any cases, dating from 2000 to 2006, when the Causeway Trust received representations from the law firm Brangam and Bagnall on behalf of members of the Trust's senior management team.

(AQW 3006/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mr M McGimpsey): As far as I am aware, there were no cases between 2000 to 2006 in which the Causeway Trust received representations from the law firm Brangam Bagnall & Co on behalf of members of the Trust's senior management team.

Fermanagh and South Tyrone Heart Surgery Referrals

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many referrals there have been from the Fermanagh and South Tyrone constituency for heart surgery to (i) The Mater Private Hospital, Dublin; (ii) Blackrock Hospital, Dublin; (iii) Guys Hospital, London; (iv) HCI International Medical Centre, Glasgow, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 7324/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on the number of patients residing in the Fermanagh and South Tyrone constituency that were referred to (i) The Mater Private Hospital, Dublin; (ii) Blackrock Hospital, Dublin; (iii) Guys Hospital, London and (iv) HCI International Medical Centre, Glasgow, for heart surgery, together with the number that had heart surgery in Health and Social Care Hospitals in Northern Ireland, in each of the last three years, are contained in the table below.

Financial Year	Number of patients residing in the Fermanagh and South Tyrone constituency that received heart surgery in:				
	Mater Private Hospital Dublin	Blackrock Hospital Dublin	Guys Hospital London	HCI International Medical Centre Glasgow	HSC Hospitals in Northern Ireland
2006/07	19	3	0	0	407
2007/08	27	0	4	0	456
2008/09	62	4	2	0	508 ¹

Source: Belfast HSC Trust and DHSSPS Hospital Inpatient System

¹ Data are provisional

In 2008/09, the Belfast HSC Trust was contracted to provide 1,000 elective cases in cardiac surgery. Due to increased demand for surgery however, there was a need to access treatment outside Northern Ireland for an additional 68 patients from the Fermanagh and South Tyrone constituency. This use of the independent sector ensured that patients had timely access to the surgical treatment they required. Patients are offered a choice of referral to other centres, however if they choose not to be referred outside NI this may impact on their waiting time for treatment.

Paediatric Epilepsy Specialists

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps he is taking to address the shortage of paediatric epilepsy specialists. (AQW 7807/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Following a recruitment process, a paediatric neurologist was offered the available post at the Royal Belfast Hospital on 1 May, 2009. The successful candidate has indicated a start date in September of this year.

In January 2009, I announced £220,000 additional recurrent funding to strengthen our existing regional paediatric neurology services. This will provide for specialist ketogenic dieticians, a paediatric neurology nurse, and a regional paediatric neurology multidisciplinary team.

An additional £9m has also been allocated for the three years until 2011 to support children and young people with complex physical healthcare needs, including those with epilepsy, to live within their family setting. Among other resources, this funding will provide for additional children's nurses, Allied Health Professionals and support workers.

NICE Epilepsy Guidelines

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on implementation of the NICE epilepsy guidelines. (AQW 7808/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: NICE clinical guidelines, including epilepsy guidelines, are advisory good practice documents covering a wide range of issues relating to the management of a disease or medical condition. They are regarded as developmental standards designed to encourage and support moves to better practice that HSC organisations are expected to achieve over time.

The Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority is responsible for reviewing clinical and social care governance arrangements in individual HSC Trusts against a range of quality standards. This includes compliance with best practice guidance concerned with safe and effective care such as NICE guidelines.

Epilepsy

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) what consideration he has given to the Welsh Assembly's Service Development and Commissioning Directive for Epilepsy; and (ii) if he will implement similar recommendations. (AQW 7809/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: In Northern Ireland people suffering from this very debilitating condition have access to appropriate care and treatment, ranging from primary and community care to specialist regional neurology services, depending on their assessed individual needs.

I can advise that in 2002, following a review of neurology services, my Department published 30 recommendations for improvements in the provision and delivery of services, including epilepsy. I have now commissioned a full and comprehensive evaluation and report of the effectiveness of the implementation of those recommendations.

In parallel with that evaluation my Department will review the continued relevance of these recommendations in light of any professional or other guidance issued since their publication. That review will include advice and guidance issued in other parts of the United Kingdom.

The work now underway will inform the Department as to the need for the further development of services for people with epilepsy in Northern Ireland.

Epilepsy

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many diagnosed cases of epilepsy there are in the Western Health and Social Care Trust area. (AQW 7909/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on the number of diagnosed cases of epilepsy and paediatric epilepsy there are in the Western Health and Social Care Trust area is not available.

MRSA

Mr M Storey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether his Department has given nursing homes the same priority as hospitals in its recommendations for combating the spread of MRSA infection; and to detail how his Department monitors and audits the implementation of its anti MRSA policy in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust. (AQW 8252/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: These homes are run by independent providers outside of the health service but they are regulated, and they are inspected by the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA). Guidance on infection prevention and control has been provided by the RQIA to private nursing homes, including the Northern Ireland online Regional Infection Prevention and Control Manual.

The RQIA registers and inspects a wide range of health and social care services. RQIA's inspections are based on a new set of minimum care standards which will ensure that both the public and the service providers know what quality of services is expected. RQIA inspectors visit nursing and residential care homes to examine all aspects of the care provided, to guarantee the comfort and dignity of those using the facilities, and ensure public confidence in these services. When inspecting private nursing homes RQIA inspectors look for observance of best practice in infection prevention and control. Ultimately the RQIA has powers to close any regulated establishment where there is a serious or persistent failure affecting patient safety.

Much of the work done to date on the prevention and control of healthcare-associated infections is important for protecting residents of nursing homes, e.g. promoting good hand hygiene; ensuring high standards of environmental cleanliness, and guidance on antibiotic prescribing to reduce the risk of antimicrobial resistance.

My Department is currently developing a general policy on MRSA screening. In April 2008 the Department issued best practice guidance on MRSA screening for high risk patients and advised the HSC Trusts to review their policies on MRSA screening to determine the most appropriate approach to screening their patient population.

Family Support Workers

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 8005/09, if the lack of contracts for the eight Armagh and Dungannon Family Support Workers who are being reemployed to "ensure equity of service provision" has resulted in them being unfairly treated in comparison with their three Craigavon counterparts who have not been targeted for redeployment. (AQW 8279/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Southern Trust has advised that this process is taking place in full consultation with relevant Union representatives to ensure that due process is followed.

They are endeavouring to ensure that all staff are treated equally with the objective of providing them with permanent Trust Contracts as is the case in the Craigavon and Banbridge area. These staff are also affected by this process as they will also be realigned to the existing Social Work teams resulting in a new management arrangement.

RPA has resulted in many changes for all grades of staff which is now what is happening in relation to Family Support Workers. It must be stressed that the development is in the context of an improved service for families across the Southern Trust and a service which is more efficient.

As advised previously, the Head of Family Support for the Southern Trust is happy to meet with you to discuss this matter if you would find that helpful.

Supporting Families in Northern Ireland Response Document

Lord Browne asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the outcomes from his Department's 'Supporting Families in Northern Ireland Response Document' of 2007. (AQW 8532/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Families Matter response document showed strong support for the themes and proposals outlined in the consultation document and highlighted a need for stronger intergovernmental working; helping families of children with additional needs and 'hard to reach' families access universal services; and the need to consider the role of social services in the provision of effective preventative family support services. These issues were considered and incorporated into the final Families Matter strategy document that I launched on 12 March 2009.

Ulster Hospital

Lord Browne asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the average waiting time between a first appointment and the required treatment being administered, in the Ulster Hospital.

(AQW 8533/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on the average waiting time between a first outpatient appointment and subsequent inpatient admission is not collected by the Department. Provision of this information by the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust would incur a disproportionate cost.

Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many patients have been diagnosed with Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy over the last three years.

(AQW 8545/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on the number of patients that have been diagnosed with Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy over the last three years is not available.

Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he has had discussions with people diagnosed with Duchenne muscular dystrophy regarding the creation of a centre of excellence.

(AQW 8546/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Officials from my Department have had an initial meeting with representatives of Action Duchenne to discuss the issues raised in their campaign document "Race Against Time", including the provision of a centre of excellence. A further meeting is proposed for the early autumn, the timing of which is being agreed so that certain members of Action Duchenne will be available to discuss these issues with my officials in more depth.

Patient Client Councils

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) to list the appointments to the new Patient Client Councils; and (ii) to detail the criteria used by the selection panel in recommending those appointments.

(AQW 8554/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:

- (i) In response to the list of those appointed to the Patient and Client Council I refer the Member to www.patientclientcouncil.hscni.net
- (ii) Prior to the commencement of interviews the panel agreed the pass mark for all candidates. Those candidates found to be above the line were recommended for appointment to Minister. They were not ranked in order nor were the interview scores given. This is fully compliant with the Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland Code of Practice for Ministerial appointments to public bodies.

Epilepsy

Mr C Boylan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of people diagnosed as having epilepsy, broken down by constituency.

(AQW 8556/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information is not available on the number of people diagnosed as having epilepsy, broken down by constituency.

Epilepsy

Mr C Boylan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the number of specialist consultants in epilepsy; and (ii) their location. (AQW 8558/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There are 5 (5.0 WTE) consultants with a special interest in epilepsy (3 adult, 2 paediatric) who are employed by the Belfast HSC Trust. The 3 adult specialists are based at the Royal Victoria Hospital and the 2 paediatric specialists are based at the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children (RBHSC). In addition, there is another consultant with a special interest in epilepsy (1.0 WTE) who is due to take up a paediatric post in the RBHSC in September 2009. These consultants also hold clinics in the other HSC Trusts. This information has been obtained directly from the HSC Trusts. Note that consultant neurologists also regularly see patients with epilepsy.

Note: WTE is the whole-time equivalent number of staff is calculated by aggregating the total number of hours that staff in a grade are contracted to work, and dividing by the standard hours for that grade.

Epilepsy

Mr C Boylan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if there is a dedicated fund to help people diagnosed with epilepsy, their families, carers and support groups. (AQW 8559/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Health & Social Care Board provides funding for 3 dedicated epilepsy nurses in Trusts to help those with intractable epilepsy and other neurological conditions.

Fertility Services

Mrs M O'Neill asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if the 18 week waiting time initiative applies to fertility services. (AQW 8579/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The 18 week waiting time initiative referred to does not apply to Northern Ireland. Within Northern Ireland the target of a maximum wait of 9 weeks for a first outpatient appointment applies to fertility treatment. I have also recently introduced extra funding for the service to ensure a maximum waiting time of 1 year from being placed on a waiting list for IVF to receiving treatment.

Fertility Counseling Services

Mr J O'Dowd asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the current level of counselling/support services available for couples who have fertility problems; and what plans he has to improve this provision. (AQW 8580/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I refer the member to AQW 8358/09.

IVF/ICSI Treatments

Mr J O'Dowd asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps he is taking to increase the number of IVF/ICSI treatments, as in the NICE guidelines. (AQW 8583/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I refer the member to AQW 8312/09

Clinical Physiologists

Mrs M O'Neill asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the procedure for obtaining a section 60 order for the statutory regulation of clinical physiologists; and what is the proposed timeline for an order to be laid down. (AQW 8585/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Statutory regulation of clinical physiologists, like most healthcare professionals, will be on a UK-wide basis and consequently the Department of Health (DH) in

England is taking the lead in bringing forward legislation which will lead to regulation of this group. DH has provided a timeline to the Registration Council for Clinical Physiologists (RCCP), the profession's leadership body, for the development of this UK-wide legislation.

Currently work has commenced on policy development and the preparation of draft legislation together with an impact assessment. It is expected the policy will be issued for consultation later this year. Unfortunately it is not possible to give a precise date for laying the draft legislation. The section 60 order can take up to 2 years to progress. This timeline is based on there being no other demands made on Parliamentary time. It takes into account a 3 month public consultation period and is subject to any delay occurring as part of the Parliamentary process.

Regional Fertility Clinic

Mrs M O'Neill asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans his Department has to increase the capacity of the regional fertility clinic to meet the demands on the service. (AQW 8586/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The limiting factor on publicly funded fertility treatment in Northern Ireland has always been the availability of funding rather than capacity. I have recently introduced an extra £1.5m per annum in order to reduce waiting times and improve access.

Dystonia

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much resources have been set aside for dystonia. (AQW 8590/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested is not available.

Macular Degeneration

Lord Browne asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when will treatment for patients with Macular Degeneration be available. (AQW 8605/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Treatment with argon laser and photodynamic therapy is available for patients with wet age-related macular degeneration (wet AMD) who are clinically suitable for these treatments. Treatment with Lucentis (ranibizumab) for wet AMD is also currently available to patients with the greatest clinical priority.

Bowel Cancer Screening Programme

Lord Browne asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what his proposals are to implement the Bowel Cancer Screening Programme. (AQW 8606/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: In the recently published Priorities for Action for 2009-10, I have set a target for the introduction of bowel cancer screening by December 2009.

Bowel cancer screening (PSA 1.11): by December 2009, Commissioners and Trusts should establish a comprehensive bowel screening programme for those aged 60-69 (to include appropriate arrangements for follow-up treatment).

From December 2009 it is intended that all eligible men and women aged between 60 and 69 are to be offered screening every 2 years. The programme would then be extended to age 74 from 2012.

A project management structure is currently in place to oversee the implementation of the bowel screening programme across Northern Ireland.

Rare Diseases

Lord Browne asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what his proposals are for developing and implementing plans or strategies for dealing with rare diseases. (AQW 8608/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: It is intended that in the near future, officials from each of the Devolved Administrations will meet with colleagues in the Department of Health to discuss the recent European Union Council Recommendation that Member States should establish and implement plans or strategies for rare diseases.

The outcome of this meeting will help determine how my Department takes this matter forward in Northern Ireland.

Dystonia

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people, in each constituency, have been diagnosed with dystonia. (AQW 8613/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on the number of people, in each constituency, that have been diagnosed with dystonia is not available.

Cancer Fund for Children

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what financial assistance his Department offers to the Cancer Fund for Children. (AQW 8614/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Through the Children's Fund, my Department has supported the Northern Ireland Cancer Fund for Children (NICFC) since October 2003. In that time, it has received grant assistance in the region of £163,000.

Although the Children's Fund ended in March 2009, my Department continued to fund all of those projects formerly supported by the Children's Fund that support the objectives and functions of my Department, which includes the NICFC's Family Dynamics Project. Grant funding of £44,550 for the period 1 April 2009 to 31 March 2009 was made available to support the project's work. NICFC will continue to receive DHSSPS project funding of £23,612 in 2009/10 and £24,202 in 2010/11 for the Family Dynamics Project.

Dystonia

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many specialist nurses are there for patients diagnosed with dystonia. (AQW 8615/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: According to the Health & Social Care Trusts, there are no specialist nurses with the specific remit of treating patients with dystonia.

Personality Disorder

Mrs M O'Neill asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what treatment is offered to patients presenting with personality disorders. (AQW 8627/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: People with personality disorders are treated within mental health services. Where specialist treatment is required Trusts are able to make referrals to inpatient services in GB.

My Department has recently consulted on a strategy for the development of services for people with a personality disorder. This will be published later this year. £0.6m has been allocated this year to start to develop services for people with these disorders. A further £2.5m will be allocated from 2010/11 for this purpose.

Personality Disorder

Mrs M O'Neill asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if personality disorder is recognised under the Mental Health Act. (AQW 8628/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Currently under the Mental Health (Northern Ireland) Order 1986, a person suffering "by reason only of personality disorder" does not fall within the definition of mental disorder. A person suffering from a personality disorder will only fall within the ambit of mental health legislation if diagnosed with a coexistent mental disorder.

Personality Disorder

Mrs M O'Neill asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people have been referred to England, or elsewhere, for treatment for a personality disorder over the past three years. (AQW 8629/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: In total there have been 48 referrals to England for treatment for a personality disorder over the last 3 years.

Personality Disorder

Mrs M O'Neill asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people are currently being treated for a personality disorder in Northern Ireland. (AQW 8630/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Figures are not available for the number of people being treated for a personality disorder. It is generally accepted that between 20 – 40% of patients admitted to acute mental health inpatient care will have a single or co-morbid diagnosis of personality disorder. Also, 10% of the outpatient list of general adult psychiatrists will include patients with a single or co-morbid diagnosis of personality disorder.

Personality Disorder

Mrs M O'Neill asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he plans to change the recognition of personality disorder in legislation. (AQW 8631/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department, in January 2009, issued the consultation document 'A Legislative Framework for Mental Capacity and Mental Health Legislation in Northern Ireland'. This paper outlined my Department's intention to reform mental health legislation which included a proposal to develop a new definition of mental disorder that will no longer exclude those suffering solely from personality disorder.

Legal Fees

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the total amount of money which has been paid to solicitors and barristers by his Department in respect of legal fees, in each of the last five years. (AQW 8634/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested is not readily available in the format requested and could only be obtained at a disproportionate cost.

Referrals to Hospitals in the Republic of Ireland

Mrs C Hanna asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many patients have been referred to hospitals in the Republic of Ireland for treatment in each of the past five years. (AQW 8639/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The total number of patients referred for inpatient treatment to hospitals in the Republic of Ireland in the financial year 2008/09, was 436. The provision of data for the previous four years would incur disproportionate cost.

Southern Health and Social Care Trust

Mr W Irwin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, to detail the plans for capital expenditure by the Southern Health and Social Care Trust over the next five years. (AQW 8641/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I announced in December 2008 that £63m capital investment would be provided to improve health and social care services in the Southern Trust area over the current 3-year CSR period ending 2010/11. This is part of a total planned investment of some £315m in the Southern Trust area over the 10-year ISNI period ending 2017/18.

Prader-Willi Syndrome Association

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what assistance his Department has given, and will give, to the outreach development worker for the Prader-Willi Syndrome Association. (AQW 8670/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Whilst my Department currently does not fund a Prader-Willi Syndrome Outreach development worker the Prader-Willi Association has been in contact with the Health and Social Care Board seeking funding for an outreach development worker. Discussions are ongoing and a response will be issued shortly.

Allowances for Social Workers

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what allowances are granted to social workers when attending work-related events in Great Britain; and to detail the amount of money allocated for these allowances and if he will make a statement on this matter. (AQW 8674/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: This information is not held centrally, however Trusts advise that in relation to attending work related events in Great Britain social workers are entitled to the same allowances as all other Health & Social Services staff. These are subject to Agenda for Change and contained within the Agenda for Change NHS Terms and Conditions of Service Handbook.

Annex 1, Section 18 of the Handbook details all the information you require and Annex N provides an updated schedule of the current rates of payment for subsistence allowances. I have attached this for your information.

There is no budget allocation for this specifically for social workers that I am aware of. Each case is dealt with on its merits under Agenda for Change conditions.

Annex 1

Part 3: Terms and Conditions Section 18: Subsistence Allowances

Section 18

Subsistence Allowances

18.1 Where locally, staff and employer representatives agree arrangements which are more appropriate to local operational circumstances or which provide benefits to staff beyond those provided by this section, or are agreed as operationally preferable, those local arrangements will apply.

18.2 The purpose of this Section is to reimburse staff for the necessary extra costs of meals, accommodation and travel arising as a result of official duties away from home. Business expenses which may arise, such as the cost of a fax or official telephone calls, may be reimbursed with certificated proof of expenditure.

Night Subsistence

Short Overnight Stays in Hotels, Guest Houses and Commercial Accommodation

18.3 When an employee stays overnight in a hotel, guest house, or other commercial accommodation with the agreement of the employer, the overnight costs will be reimbursed as follows:

- the actual, receipted cost of bed and breakfast up to the normal maximum limit set out in Annex N; plus
- a meals allowance, to cover the cost of a main evening meal and one other day-time meal, at the rate set out in Annex N.

18.4 Where the maximum limit is exceeded for genuine business reasons (e.g. the choice of hotel was not within the employee's control or cheaper hotels were fully booked) additional assistance may be granted at the discretion of the employer.

Short Overnight Stays in Non-Commercial Accommodation

18.5 Where an employee stays for short overnight periods with friends or relatives or in a caravan or other non-commercial accommodation the flat rate sum set out in paragraph 3 of Annex N is payable. This includes an allowance for meals. No receipts will be required.

18.6 Employees staying in accommodation provided by the employer or host organisation shall be entitled to an allowance to cover meals which are not provided free of charge up to the total set out in paragraph 2 of Annex N.

18.7 Where accommodation and meals are provided without charge to employees, e.g. on residential training courses, an incidental expenses Terms and Conditions of Service Handbook.

Part 3: Terms and Conditions Section 18: Subsistence Allowance at the rate set out in paragraph 6 of Annex N will be payable.

All payments of this allowance are subject to the deductions of appropriate tax and National Insurance contributions via the payroll system.

Travelling Overnight in a Sleeping Berth (Rail or Boat)

18.8 The cost of a sleeping berth (rail or boat) and meals, excluding alcoholic drinks, will be reimbursed subject to the production of vouchers.

Short-term Temporary Absence Travel Costs

18.9 Travel costs between the hotel and temporary place of work will be separately reimbursed on an actual cost basis.

Long-term Overnight Stays

18.10 After the first 30 nights stay in the same location the entitlement to night subsistence shall be reduced to the maximum rates set out in paragraph 4 of Annex N. Meals allowances are not payable to these employees. Those who continue to stay in non-commercial accommodation will continue to be entitled to the rate set out in paragraph 3 of Annex N.

Day Subsistence

18.11 A meal allowance is payable when an employee is necessarily absent from home and more than five miles from their base by the shortest practicable route on official business. Day meals allowance rates are set out in paragraph 5 of Annex N. These allowances are not paid where meals are provided free at the temporary place of work.

18.12 A day meals allowance is payable only when an employee necessarily spends more on a meal/meals than would have been spent at their place of work. An employee shall certify accordingly on each occasion for which day meals allowance is claimed but a receipt is not required.

18.13 Normally an employee claiming a lunch meal allowance would be expected to be away from his/her base for a period of more than five hours and covering the normal lunch time period of 12.00 pm to 2.00 pm. To claim an evening meals allowance an employee would normally be expected to be away from base for more than ten hours and unable to return to base or home before 7.00 pm and as a result of the late return is required to have an evening meal. Employees may qualify for both lunch and evening meal allowance in some circumstances. There will be occasions where, due to the time of departure, there will be the necessity to take a meal but the conditions relating to the time absent.

Annexes Annex N: Subsistence Allowances**Annex N****Subsistence Allowances****Schedule of Recommended Allowances**

1. Night Allowances: First 30 Nights

Actual receipted cost of bed and breakfast up to a maximum of £55 (subject to the provisions of paragraph 18.3 of Section 18 if this is exceeded for genuine business reasons)

2. Meals Allowance Per 24 hour period £20.00

3. Night allowances in non-commercial accommodation Per 24 hour period £25.00

4. Night Allowances: After First 30 Nights

Married employees and employees with responsibilities equivalent to those of married employees Maximum amount payable: £35.00

Employees without responsibilities equivalent to those of married employees and those staying in non-commercial accommodation Maximum amount payable: £25.00

5. Day Meals Subsistence Allowances

Lunch Allowance (more than five hours away from base, including the lunchtime period between 12.00pm to 2.00pm) £5.00

Evening Meal Allowance (more than ten hours away from base and return after 7.00pm) £15.00

6. Incidental Expenses Allowance (this allowance is subject to a tax liability) Per 24 hour period: £4.20

Terms and Conditions of Service Handbook

7. Late Night Duties Allowance (this allowance is subject to a tax liability) Per 24 hour period: £3.25

Areas of Health Cooperation

Mr M Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in respect of each of the five areas of health cooperation identified in the Belfast Agreement, to outline all activities and projects currently in place. (AQW 8679/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Activities and projects currently in place in the 5 areas of co-operation in health are included in the table below.

Current Projects and Activities in each of the Five Areas of Health Cooperation Identified in the Belfast Agreement**Accident and Emergency Services (this has been taken to cover acute services generally)**

- cross-border Oral and Maxillo Facial Services in the North West
- piloting of cross-border GP Out-of-hours Services in Inishowen-Londonderry and Castleblayney-Keady

Planning for Major Emergencies

- Fire and Rescue Services including dealing with emergencies and road accident responses in border areas
- training and planning for major emergencies
- infectious disease emergency planning
- close co-operation on the recent Influenza A/H1N1 outbreak

High Technology Equipment

- provision of radiotherapy treatment for Donegal patients at Belfast City Hospital

Cancer Research

- continuing work of the Cancer Consortium (Ireland - Northern Ireland - National Cancer Institute (NCI) in Washington DC) including:
 - common protocols, definitions and datasets utilised by cancer registries

- use of telesynergy centres in both jurisdictions linked to the NCI - to aid diagnosis of rare conditions and for research collaborations
- the extension of cancer prevention fellowship programme;
- all-island participation in clinical trials involving the Irish Co-operative Oncology Research Group;
- development of an all-Island Research and Development Strategy for Cancer Nursing;
- training and awards programmes; and
- consideration of development of an all-island biobank.

Health Promotion

- continuing co-operation in health promotion between the relevant agencies across a wide range of topics, settings and population groups
- all-island Obesity Action Forum
- recommendations on priority areas of work by the Institute of Public Health (IPH)
- focus on feasibility and sustainability and where the best gains could be made in terms of shared learning and resources and optimising effectiveness
- Suicide Prevention is included as a specific aspect of health promotion and
 - current actions under consideration include:
 - Training and Education, such as evaluation of Applied Suicide Intervention Skills training
 - Development of performance indicators for relevant actions
 - Media monitoring/Guidelines
 - Men's Health Forum
 - further extension of Irish Registry of self harm pilot study within N Ireland
 - Data collection arrangements
 - Public awareness campaign
 - Development of annual report to NSMC
 - Membership of respective implementation groups
 - All-Island mapping of voluntary/community suicide prevention support groups

Areas of Health Cooperation

Mr M Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in respect of each of the five areas of health cooperation identified in the Belfast Agreement, to outline (i) all activities and projects in planning or under development; and (ii) to outline all activities and projects implemented in the last five years. (AQW 8680/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My answers to the member's previous questions AQW 8679/09 and AQW 8695/09 refer to activities and projects in place and being developed and to the recent completion of a study looking at the potential for other areas of co-operation. There are no other projects in planning.

The table below provides a summary of key projects and activities over the past five years. While some of these have been completed, others are ongoing and are also recorded under projects currently in place.

Projects and Activities (in each of the Five Areas of Health Cooperation Identified in the Belfast Agreement) Addressed Over the Last Five Years

Accident and Emergency Services (this has been taken to cover acute services generally)

- Provision of Oral and Maxillo Facial Services on a cross border basis in the North West
- Exchanges of information arising from reviews of renal services in each jurisdiction

Planning for Major Emergencies

- Cross-border First Responder Project evaluated and responsibility transferred to the Ambulance Services in each jurisdiction
- Cost benefit study of an all-island Helicopter Emergency Medical Service

- development of road accident mobilisation strategy for fire and rescue services in border areas
- combined community fire prevention awareness and education programmes
- Exercise Medical Bridge - a major cross-border emergency planning exercise (April 2007)
- Exercise Medical Bridge II (April 2008)
- Exercise Foyle Venture (October 2008)
- Major Incident Medical Management and Support course (2007)
- pandemic flu workshop (2006)
- infectious disease emergency planning

High Technology Equipment

- arrangements for the provision of radiotherapy treatment for Donegal patients at Belfast City Hospital were agreed at the end of 2006

Cancer Research

- Projects initiated by the Cancer Consortium (Ireland - Northern Ireland - National Cancer Institute (NCI) in Washington DC) including:
 - publication of all-island Cancer Statistics Reports by Cancer Registries
 - review of the Memorandum of Understanding (2005) and renewal of (2006)
 - common protocols, definitions and datasets utilised by cancer registries
 - establishment of telesynergy centres (including at the Belfast City Hospital) linked to the NCI - to aid diagnosis of rare conditions and for research collaborations
 - epidemiological cancer research fellowships
 - all-island cancer prevention workshops
 - scholar and nursing exchange programme with NCI
 - all-island participation in clinical trials involving the Irish Co-operative Oncology Research Group

Health Promotion

- conferences on men's health, workplace health and physical activity (2004-05)
- conferences on health promoting hospitals, mental health, breast feeding and obesity (2004-05)
- Ministerial meetings on control of smoking and suicide prevention (2005)
- Health promoting hospitals conferences in 2006 and 2007
- research into health and lifestyle issues
- "Little steps" media campaign on healthy eating and physical activity for children (2008)
- multi-sectoral conference on obesity (November 2008)
- 3rd all-Island breastfeeding conference (2008)
- all-island Obesity Action Forum established (December 2008)
- all-island action on suicide prevention included as a specific aspect of health promotion from 2007 and activities have included:
 - Congress of the International Association for Suicide Prevention (August 2007)
 - Training and Education, such as evaluation of Applied Suicide Intervention Skills training
 - All-Island Training Needs Analysis
 - Resource Officer/Awareness Coordinator meetings
 - Media monitoring/Guidelines
 - Men's Health Forum
 - Irish Registry of self harm pilot study within the Western Board Area of N Ireland
 - Tackling Harmful Internet content and liaison between respective UK and RoI bodies
 - All-Island mapping of voluntary/community suicide prevention support groups

Areas of Health Cooperation

Mr M Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) what areas of health cooperation have been developed beyond those identified in the Belfast Agreement, and (ii) what plans his Department has for the identification and roll-out of further areas of cooperation. (AQW 8695/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Co-operation between the two health Departments and the various agencies and bodies responsible for delivering health (and social) care has taken place over many years. It includes meetings and regular exchanges of information at administrative or professional level; co-operation in training and continuing education and with regard to professional regulation; the all-island and cross-border work of the Institute of Public Health and that of CAWT (Co-operation and Working Together); provision of assistance to deal with emergencies; and the transfer of patients requiring specialist or continuing care.

Following an NSMC Plenary decision in February 2008, DHSSPS and DOHC were asked to develop a work programme to intensify co-operation on Child Protection.

A joint Feasibility Study to examine the potential for more strategic co-operation in the area of health and social well-being has been undertaken by the two Departments. This recently completed study looked at both the existing five areas and other aspects of health and social care. Its report is currently being considered by Health Ministers in each jurisdiction.

Hip Arthroscopy

Mr D O'Loan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when surgical treatment for hip arthroscopy will be available. (AQW 8696/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I refer the Member to the answer I gave to AQO 2411/09.

Heart Attacks and Strokes

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of both men and women, who have had (i) heart attacks; and (ii) strokes, in the age brackets (a) 20-29 years of age; (b) 30-39 years of age; (c) 40-60 years of age in each of the last three years. (AQW 8713/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on the number of both men and women, who have had (i) heart attacks; and (ii) strokes, in the age brackets (a) 20-29 years of age; (b) 30-39 years of age; (c) 40-60 years of age in each of the last three years is not available.

Heart Attacks and Strokes

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps he is taking to address the increase in the number of heart attacks and strokes. (AQW 8714/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I am fully aware of the high numbers of people in Northern Ireland who suffer from heart attack and stroke each year. To address this issue I recently published the service framework for cardiovascular health and wellbeing which sets out 45 standards in relation to the prevention, assessment, diagnosis, treatment, care and rehabilitation of individuals/communities who currently have or are at greater risk of developing cardiovascular disease including heart attack and stroke. I also published 14 recommendations and accompanying standards for improving all aspects of stroke care in Northern Ireland in June 2008.

As part of the current budget I have invested £12 million in cardiovascular services and £14 million in stroke services. Much of this funding will support the delivery of the cardiovascular framework.

Finally I have allocated approximately £2.5 million towards tobacco control this year as I am aware that it is also a major risk factor for coronary heart disease, stroke and other diseases of the circulatory system.

Ulster Hospital

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, what steps he is taking to ensure additional consultant cover is provided in the light of four cancer consultants being absent from work in the Ulster Hospital. (AQW 8717/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: It is the responsibility of the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust to ensure adequate consultant cover at the Ulster Hospital. The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust has confirmed that, out of the three visiting oncologists who provide oncology services at the Ulster Hospital, one is currently on sick leave; this oncologist normally provides 2 outpatient oncology sessions per week. A locum oncologist is currently providing cover for one of these sessions, with a further locum oncologist secured to cover the remaining session. There has been no corresponding delay in patient treatment.

There are no other consultants, who provide care to cancer patients, currently on sick or maternity leave; however, normal leave arrangements are in progress for consultants throughout the Trust. Although it is not normal practice to provide locum cover for annual leave, there has been no detrimental impact on patient care.

Ambulance Service and Fire and Rescue Service

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail how many (i) ambulance service (ii) fire service staff have retired due to ill health in each of the last five years; and what percentage this represents of (a) all staff who retired that year and (b) the total workforce. (AQW 8721/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested is shown in the tables below:

NORTHERN IRELAND AMBULANCE SERVICE

Year	Staff retiring on health grounds	% of all staff retiring	% of total workforce
2004	6	14	0.6
2005	5	15	0.5
2006	8	24	0.8
2007	4	8	0.4
2008	9	21	0.8

NORTHERN IRELAND FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

Year	Staff retiring on health grounds	% of all staff retiring	% of total workforce
2004	36	54	1.7
2005	31	65	1.5
2006	29	62	1.4
2007	18	78	0.8
2008	13	35	0.6

Addiction to Gambling

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if the Department has any statistics on the number of people who suffer from addiction to gambling and to outline what help is offered to them through his Department. (AQW 8727/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: No information is available centrally on the numbers of people being treated for gambling addiction related illnesses. There is no record of patients receiving treatment solely for a gambling addiction although those patients with a co-existent mental illness or alcohol problem may receive therapy for gambling as part of their treatment.

Nurses Working in Northern Ireland

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) how many nurses working in Northern Ireland were trained in Northern Ireland; and (ii) how many were trained in the rest of the UK.

(AQW 8731/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested is not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

The Nursing Profession

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of non UK nationals who are working in the nursing profession; and how many of these are from the Republic of Ireland.

(AQW 8753/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested is not held centrally and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Hygiene Inspections for Hospital Wards

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what measures he is introducing to ensure that the hygiene inspections for hospital wards are carried out on time, and that the results are displayed at the entrance to the wards.

(AQW 8754/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: As part of dealing with the wider issue of hygiene, my Department is finalising the 2009-2011 Regional Action Plan for tackling healthcare associated infections and is considering the need to publicly display key performance information including environmental cleanliness which is one aspect of hygiene.

The Department's Cleanliness Matters Toolkit recommends the frequency of cleaning and frequency of audits of environmental cleanliness. Work to review the Cleanliness Matters Strategy will begin in September 2009 and will consider the performance measurement arrangements for cleaning and audits of environmental cleanliness.

Surgical Instruments Left Inside Patients' Bodies

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many instances of surgical instruments being left inside patients' bodies after surgery have been recorded in each of the last five years.

(AQW 8755/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on the number of recorded instances of surgical instruments being left inside patients' bodies after surgery in each of the last five years is not available.

Community Health Village in Banbridge

Mr J O'Dowd asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what the status is of the proposed plans to build a Community Health Village in Banbridge, and if a start date has been confirmed.

(AQW 8757/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Work on the development of the Banbridge Community Health Village commenced in 2004 and all of the projects located in the Health Village have been completed and are operational apart from the proposed Health and Care Centre and Day Centre.

The Business Case for this is currently being finalised.

Agency Nursing Staff

Lord Browne asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the costs of employing agency nurses in each of the Health and Social Care Trusts in each of the last three years. (AQW 8762/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I refer the member to the answer I gave to AQW 7291/09.

Charges for Wigs

Mr P Doherty asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline his Department's policy on charges for wigs for patients undergoing treatment for cancer and other conditions which result in hair loss; and to explain why £50 is charged for a wig at Altnagelvin Hospital and not in at least one other Health Board area. (AQW 8763/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Charges for wigs were introduced in 1971 under the Health Service Charges Regulations 1971. These charges reflect the long standing principle that those who can contribute towards the cost of the appliance they need should do so. Policy in this area is common throughout the health service.

Hospital inpatients are exempt from charges, as are children, students, and war pensioners. Day patients and outpatients are not entitled to exemption from charges but may qualify for exemption or assistance if they are on low income.

The Western Health and Social Care Trust holds a contract that includes a catalogue of wigs paid for by the Trust. A patient is only charged if they request a wig outside of the contract list.

Psychiatric and Cognitive Treatments

Mr J O'Dowd asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why out-patients receiving psychiatric and cognitive treatments are forced to change psychiatrist and cognitive therapist when they reach 65 years of age. (AQW 8766/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Outpatients receiving psychiatric and cognitive treatments are not necessarily required to change psychiatrist or cognitive therapist when they reach age 65. It is considered good mental health practice not to treat patients on the basis of chronological age but in relation to their clinical needs.

On approaching the age of 65 (or earlier if appropriate) a patient/client receiving mental health services should have a review assessment to determine their future healthcare needs. If deemed appropriate, care should continue to be provided beyond the age of 65 by the clinical team already providing care. Alternatively, it may be more appropriate to initiate transition arrangements with services for older people. This may be for reasons of increasing physical frailty or early onset of organic conditions such as Alzheimer's disease for which the latter service would be more appropriate. In all circumstances, the clinical needs of the individual patient/client should be the determining factor in the delivery of healthcare.

Adults with a Disability

Mr P Doherty asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what discussions he has had with the Minister for Employment and Learning, to develop an inter-departmental strategy to ensure that the holistic needs, including care, respite and training, of adults with a disability are being fully met. (AQW 8767/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I chair an interdepartmental group on Mental Health and Learning Disability to co-ordinate the Executives response to the Bamford Review. Issues relating to access to training and employment for people with a mental health need or a learning disability have been considered by that group. Subject to Executive approval, I expect to publish a Bamford Action Plan 2009-2011 shortly. It will contain commitments to action in relation to a wide range of issues affecting people with a mental health need or a learning disability, including training and employment, as well as care services and access to respite.

Adults with a Disability

Mr P Doherty asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the provision of respite care and training service for adults with a disability in the Strabane District Council area; and if he has any plans to increase the provision. (AQW 8768/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Whilst my Department is currently undertaking work to provide a clearer and fuller picture of current and future respite provision, it is up to individual Trusts to use the money allocated to each programme of care as they see fit since they are more able to identify from a local perspective where funding should be targeted. A range of training opportunities are offered in the Strabane District Council area and the Trust is involved in ongoing discussion with the HSC Board regarding the need to increase service options which are flexible in their response to need.

Investing in learning disability services remains one of my top priorities, and I have made available additional funding of £33m over the 3 year period from 2008-2011. I fully intend, subject to available funding, to continue to invest in learning disability services in line with the recommendations of the Bamford Review. However, I must stress, that the Bamford Review recognises that it will take between 10 and 15 years to drive the changes which are needed.

Adults with a Learning Disability

Mr P Doherty asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) for his assessment of the Western Health and Social Care Trust's decision not to renew, or have new contracts with learning providers for adults with a learning disability, with particular emphasis on the Strabane District Council area; and (ii) and what steps will he take to ensure that the training needs of local adults with a learning disability are fully met. (AQW 8769/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Western Trust has a range of training services in place in the Strabane District Council area. In addition there are plans for the Trust, working in partnership with the Department for Employment and Learning and the Community and Voluntary Sector, to explore options to increase training and employment opportunities for people with a learning disability. This work is at an early stage. The Trust has assured me that it continues to work towards meeting the training needs of local adults within available resources.

Mullinure, St Lukes and Longstone Hospital Sites

Mr M Brady asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he is aware of the concerns about the way in which the public consultation on the Mullinure/St Lukes and Longstone Hospital sites was conducted, the quality of information published by the Southern Health and Social Care Trust, and the consideration given by the Trust to the consultation responses. (AQW 8771/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I am content that the public consultation carried out by the Southern Health and Social Care Trust complied with relevant legislation and its own equality scheme.

The Trust reviewed each response it received and the key themes were incorporated into developing its final proposal, which was submitted to the Trust Board for consideration. Once cleared by the Trust's Board, the proposals were forwarded to my Department for consideration.

I announced my decision on the Trust's proposals on 9 July; I can assure you that in making that decision, the interests of patients and their families remained uppermost in my mind.

Mullinure Hospital

Mr M Brady asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the case made by the Southern Health and Social Care Trust for the closure of Mullinure Hospital; and if he will give an assurance that the hospital will not be closed purely on financial grounds. (AQW 8772/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: It should be noted that there are no plans to close Mullinure Hospital. The Southern Health and Social Care Trust proposes that Mullinure will no longer provide

non-acute inpatient beds however it will become a local centre for specialist services for older people; it will therefore continue to provide a very valuable resource in supporting the needs of older people in the Armagh area.

It is also important to bear in mind that no final decision has yet been made. I can assure you that in making that decision, the care of older people, delivered to the highest standard and in the most appropriate setting, will remain a key priority.

Mullinure Hospital

Mr M Brady asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he is aware that the proposed model of combining the dementia unit and the rehabilitation unit at Mullinure Hospital was rejected because “it would not address a serious concern regarding the difficulty of sustaining in-hours medical cover into the future”; and if he will review how the Southern Health and Social Care Trust applied this statement of principle to the closure of the hospital. (AQW 8773/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: It should be noted that there are no plans to close Mullinure Hospital. The Southern Health and Social Care Trust proposed that Mullinure would no longer provide non-acute inpatient beds; however, it will become a local centre for specialist services for older people and will therefore continue to provide a very valuable resource in supporting the needs of older people in the Armagh area.

When making its proposals, the Trust seriously considered the additional option of a combined inpatient unit for dementia assessment and non-acute hospital care for older people at Mullinure Hospital. The viability and relative merit of this option was discussed with medical colleagues specialising in psychiatry and geriatric medicine, and with nursing colleagues, and it was agreed that the option would not address the in-hours medical cover issues and staffing requirements.

I announced my decision on the Trust’s proposals on 9 July. I can assure you that in making that decision, the care of older people, delivered to the highest standard and in the most appropriate setting, remained a key priority.

Mullinure Hospital

Mr M Brady asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he is aware that the Southern Health and Social Care Trust was advised, in March 2009, that the main issue of concern regarding Mullinure Hospital was in-hours medical cover; and for his assessment of the Trust overlooking this issue in the consultation process yet it now claims that it was a driving factor in the hospital’s closure. (AQW 8774/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: It should be noted that there are no plans to close Mullinure Hospital. The Southern Health and Social Care Trust proposed that Mullinure would no longer provide non-acute inpatient beds; however, it will become a local centre for specialist services for older people and will therefore continue to provide a very valuable resource in supporting the needs of older people in the Armagh area.

I have been assured that the Trust’s consultation exercise took full account of the provision of appropriate in-hours medical cover.

Mullinure Hospital

Mr C Boylan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, given that the Southern Health and Social Care Trust stated in March 2009 that the Trust is committed to removing barriers to access to its services, and will continue to focus on enabling all users to have equality of access to services and care, if he will review how the Trust has applied this to the case of Mullinure Hospital. (AQW 8775/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I am content that the public consultation carried out by the Southern Health and Social Care Trust complied with relevant legislation and principles regarding accessibility and equity. The Trust’s proposals for the range and scope of community services for older people contain measures to ensure continued equity and access for all patients.

I announced my decision on the Trust’s proposals on 9 July. I can assure you that in coming to my decision, the care of patients, delivered to the highest standard and in the most appropriate setting, remained a key priority.

St Luke's Hospital

Mr C Boylan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, following the removal of the provision of acute mental health services at St Luke's by the Southern Health and Social Care Trust, for his assessment of the Trust's capacity and flexibility to deal with increasing mental health needs or unforeseen circumstances. (AQW 8776/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Bamford recommended that acute mental health services should be offered in a range of settings and not solely within in-patient settings. The Southern Health and Social Care Trust has already invested £2m over the last 3 years in home treatment and liaison services, with additional investment planned in the current year in day hospitals and other community based services.

This development of a range of mental health services allows for a "stepped care" model of mental health care which ensures that clients have rapid access to the most appropriate level of care and/or intervention. It also ensures that whilst some elements of the model are provided on a 'centralised' basis, the majority of care is provided in the patient's own locality and wherever possible in the patient's own home. This will mean that patients only remain in in-patient care for the shortest period required, with a carefully managed "step-down" process to Crisis Response and Home Treatment teams, and Mental Health resources for day treatment.

St Luke's Hospital

Mr C Boylan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what actions he is taking to ensure that the pool of expertise and experience in mental healthcare at St Luke's Hospital will not be lost to the Armagh area. (AQW 8777/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Southern Health and Social Care Trust is currently undertaking a skills audit of all the staff within St Luke's to inform the development of a redeployment plan. This process will be carefully managed so that staff are retained within the current settings on the St Luke's site during the centralization of acute services and resettlement period so that the Trust can maintain safe and effective care.

There will be job opportunities created on the St Luke's site as it will be the location for a range of specialist Community Mental Health services. It is presently the location for Community Addictions and Community Forensic Mental Health services. It is anticipated these services will be further developed in the next few years, including the appointment of specialist practitioners in personality disorder and autistic spectrum disorder. The Trust is also considering the relocation of the community eating disorder service from Lurgan to Armagh. The Trust will ensure that existing staff are facilitated in terms of access to new job opportunities within mental health.

Fertility Services

Mrs N Long asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many Health and Social Care Trusts provide secondary and tertiary fertility services; and, of those, how many have a fertility nurse advisor working in the Trust area. (AQW 8792/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: All Trusts provide secondary level fertility services. Tertiary level services for Northern Ireland are provided by the Belfast Trust at the Regional Fertility Centre.

All Trusts have been provided with funding for part time fertility nurse advisors as an integral part of their fertility treatment service provision. Two Trusts have the enhanced service in place. The other three are in the process of introducing it.

Fertility Counseling Services

Mrs N Long asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the availability of fertility counselling services in each Health and Social Care Trust area. (AQW 8794/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Counselling services are an integral part of fertility treatment and it is for commissioners and trusts to ensure that they are readily available where and when needed.

The Infertility Counselling Service, which is currently contracted to provide counselling sessions, has offices in Belfast; they also come to the Regional Fertility Centre on occasion to deliver sessions. These sessions are available to patients from across Northern Ireland. The Infertility Counselling Service is exploring the possibility of providing sessions in Cookstown, Omagh and/or Altnagelvin.

In September 2006 my predecessor announced an additional £50k per annum to improve the accessibility of counselling services within fertility services and this is being utilised to provide extra services including fertility nurse advisors in each Trust providing secondary and tertiary fertility services (though not all are yet in post). Funding has also been provided to Infertility Network UK to provide information and support to patients.

Prescription Charges for Medical Contact Lens Solution

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline his Department's policy on prescription charges for medical contact lens solution. (AQW 8807/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Contact lens solutions are not currently available on health service prescription. Prior to April 2009 they were, incorrectly, available on prescription to patients with certain eye conditions (conditions where contact lenses were the only form of correction suitable, rather than glasses), usually for patients attending a hospital eye clinic. It has recently come to light that contact lens solutions are classified as medical devices. Medical devices can only be provided on prescription if they are listed in the NI Drug Tariff. As contact lenses solutions are currently not included on the Drug Tariff they cannot be provided on prescription. I understand that the non provision of contact lenses solution on prescription has been the policy position in the rest of the UK for several years.

Cervical Smear Tests

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many cervical smear tests were carried out in each Health and Social Care Trust, in each of the last three years. (AQW 8811/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The number of cervical smear tests analysed by laboratories in each Health and Social Care Trust in each of the last three years is presented in the table below.

HSC Trust	Financial Year		
	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Belfast HSC Trust	48,185	56,463	59,440
Northern HSC Trust	29,661	31,557	36,157
Southern HSC Trust	28,651	30,137	34,357 ¹
South Eastern ² HSC Trust	n/a	n/a	n/a
Western HSC Trust	21,458	24,156	24,844
Northern Ireland Total	127,955	142,313	154,798

1: Projected figure for Southern HSC Trust for 2008/09.

2: Smears from women resident in the South Eastern Trust area are sent to the Belfast HSC Trust for analysis.

Ward Hygiene Audits

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he will reconsider his position on the publication of ward hygiene audits at the entrance to each ward. (AQW 8815/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: As part of dealing with the wider issue of hygiene, my Department is finalising the 2009-2011 Regional Action Plan for tackling healthcare associated infections and is considering the need to publicly display key performance information including environmental cleanliness which is one aspect of hygiene.

The Department's Cleanliness Matters Toolkit recommends the frequency of cleaning and frequency of audits of environmental cleanliness. Work to review the Cleanliness Matters Strategy will begin in September 2009 and will consider the performance measurement arrangements for cleaning and audits of environmental cleanliness.

Epilepsy

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what his Department is doing to lower the incidence of mis-diagnosis of epilepsy. (AQW 8817/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The diagnosis of epilepsy is a clinical one, and within the health service we have highly trained and skilled clinicians who have the expertise to see and assess people who may have epilepsy. Making a definitive diagnosis may, however, be difficult, as there are about 40 different types of epilepsy and there is no one specific diagnostic test.

In January 2009, I announced £220,000 additional recurrent funding to strengthen our existing regional paediatric neurology services. This will provide for a paediatric neurology nurse and a regional paediatric neurology multidisciplinary team. It will also allow for improved access to MRI sessions which will strengthen our diagnostic capabilities. A 3rd paediatric neurologist is due to take up post at the Belfast Trust in September of this year. The Belfast Trust is also initiating the recruitment of a paediatric neurologist with an interest in neuro-rehabilitation.

A review of adult neurology services was carried out by the Department and the results of that review were published in 2002. In relation to epilepsy, that review recommended additional epilepsy nurses and the establishment of epilepsy clinics in each Board area.

The Department has asked the Health and Social Care Board to carry out a full and comprehensive evaluation of the implementation of the recommendations of the 2002 Review and report findings to the Department by 31 March 2010. In parallel with this process, the Department will review the continued relevance of the recommendations in light of any professional or other guidance which has been issued since their publication. The results of this evaluation will inform the Department as to whether or not further changes to service provision are now required.

Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he will consider appointing an independent advisor for all matters concerning the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service. (AQW 8818/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I refer the Member to the answer I gave to AQW 6849/09 on 6 April.

General Dental Services

Mr T Gallagher asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if his Department has a policy on patients charges for registration with a dentist under General Dental Services, and if so to specify what the policy is. (AQW 8853/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department's policy is that no patient should be required to pay to register with a dentist under General Dental Services. This is set out in the Dental Charges Regulations (NI) 1989 and General Dental Services Regulations (NI) 1993 which govern the provision of General Dental Services.

Compensation After Surgery

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what compensation was issued to the patient in each of the instances where surgical implements were left inside the patient's body during surgery. (AQW 8865/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Further to my response to AQW 8755/09, information on compensation issued to patients as a result of surgical instruments being left inside the patient's body after surgery is not available.

Cooperation and Working Together

Dr K Deeny asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much of the money made available by Cooperation and Working Together is being utilised to "provide a range of additional out patient clinics across the following specialties: general medicine, dermatology, rheumatology, haematology, neurology, ENT, ophthalmology, gynae including urodynamics and colposcopy, paediatrics, orthopaedic including fractures, chronic pain and urology" as promised in the Western Health and Social Care Trust's Patient Information leaflet entitled Tyrone County Hospital - Transition of Acute Medical Services and distributed to all of our patients in March 2009. (AQW 8869/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I am advised that the Western Health and Social Care Trust has, as set out in its leaflet "Tyrone County Hospital – Transition of Acute Medical Services", increased the number of outpatient clinics at the Tyrone County Hospital. However, the Trust has advised that none of the additional clinics are funded by Cooperation and Working Together.

Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy

Mr B McElduff asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps he is taking to ensure that all people diagnosed with Duchenne muscular dystrophy are given immediate access to new drugs and treatments. (AQW 8887/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The introduction of new drugs and treatments, including those for Duchenne muscular dystrophy, is a matter for the Health and Social Care Board, supported by the Public Health Agency as service commissioners. In determining its priorities for funding, the Board and Agency will take into account local circumstances, the strategic objectives established for the Health and Social Care (HSC) sector and demands and pressures generally for access to a wide range of new effective drug therapies and treatments.

My Department has established a link with the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) whereby all guidance published by NICE from 1 July 2006 is reviewed locally for its applicability to Northern Ireland and, where appropriate, is endorsed by the Department for implementation in Northern Ireland. Any new guidance published by NICE in respect of new treatments for Duchenne muscular dystrophy will be considered under these arrangements.

Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy

Mr B McElduff asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps he is taking to ensure that all people diagnosed with Duchenne muscular dystrophy are supported by a centre of excellence within fifty miles of their home which is capable of delivering internationally agreed standards of care and support. (AQW 8888/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: High quality care for children and adults with neuromuscular diseases is currently provided at the Belfast Neuromuscular Clinic, located at Belfast City Hospital. The clinic is multi-disciplinary and, in addition to Muscular Dystrophy, also deals with other acquired muscle and nerve disorders.

Specifically in relation to the provision of a centre of excellence, as advocated by Action Duchenne in their document 'Race against Time', I can advise that officials from my Department have had an initial meeting with Action Duchenne to discuss how services for sufferers from this condition can be enhanced.

A further meeting is scheduled for early autumn. This will provide an opportunity to explore all of the proposals set out in their campaign document.

Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy

Mr B McElduff asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps he is taking to ensure that the appropriate care pathways and services are in place for young people with Duchenne muscular dystrophy to have a smooth transition to adulthood. (AQW 8891/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Care pathways are in place to ensure that people with Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy are assessed by multidisciplinary teams and appropriate services such as physiotherapy, domiciliary support, community nursing support, respite, speech and language therapy and occupational therapy, are provided on a person-centred basis to meet their individual needs. Health and Social Care Trusts provide for a smooth transition to adulthood by ensuring good communication and joint working between children's and adult services, relevant schools, Allied Health Professionals and voluntary sector partners; for example, a transitions service is provided by the Cedar Foundation. The central tenet of the transitions process is to enhance the quality of life for young people with physical and/ or sensory disabilities by promoting meaningful inclusion, independence, choice, responsibility and participation.

In addition, in February this year I announced an investment of £9m over three years to improve community services and support for children with complex physical needs and their families. This will help to facilitate the development of individual care packages based on assessment of need.

Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy

Mr B McElduff asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action he is taking to address the huge gap in terms of special care services, for people diagnosed with Duchenne muscular dystrophy. (AQW 8899/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Each person with Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy is individually assessed by a multidisciplinary team to determine the appropriate specialist services required to address their specific needs. People with this condition have access to the full range of services available to those with a physical and/or sensory disability, which include: physiotherapy, residential and nursing care, domiciliary support, community nursing support, respite, speech and language therapy, occupational therapy and day support. In addition, their carers are also offered a Carer's Assessment to determine their individual needs. My Department is currently developing a Physical and Sensory Disability Strategy, which will be subject to public consultation and will provide a broad strategic framework for the further development of services to help all people with physical and/or sensory disabilities lead as full and inclusive lives as possible in society.

Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy

Mr B McElduff asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he will set aside funding for a research facility centre to allow new drugs for people diagnosed with Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy to be administered and monitored effectively and safely. (AQW 8914/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: High quality care for children and adults with neuromuscular diseases is currently provided at the Belfast Neuromuscular Clinic, located at Belfast City Hospital. The clinic is multi-disciplinary and, in addition to Muscular Dystrophy, also deals with other acquired muscle and nerve disorders.

At national level, there are major centres of research into muscular dystrophy in London and Newcastle. Clinical practice here will be informed by any advances made at these national centres.

Specifically in relation to the provision of a centre of excellence, as advocated by Action Duchenne in their document 'Race against Time', I can advise that officials from my Department have had an initial meeting with Action Duchenne to discuss how services for sufferers from this condition can be enhanced. A further meeting is scheduled for early autumn. This will provide an opportunity to explore all of the proposals set out in their campaign document.

Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy

Mr B McElduff asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he plans to appoint a paediatric consultant with expertise in Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy as a matter of urgency. (AQW 8915/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: High quality care for children and adults with neuromuscular diseases is currently provided at the Belfast Neuromuscular Clinic, located at Belfast City Hospital. The clinic is multi-disciplinary and, in addition to Muscular Dystrophy, also deals with other acquired muscle and nerve disorders.

I can advise you that the Belfast Trust recently appointed a third consultant in paediatric neurology and we expect that person to take up post in September of this year. I understand the individual concerned has experience of working with neuromuscular disease.

In addition, officials from my Department will meet again with Action Duchenne in September to discuss how the care pathway for sufferers of Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy can be further enhanced.

Review of Public Administration

Mr B McElduff asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if re-employment opportunities exist in the Health Service for ex-employees who have taken voluntary early retirement under the Review of Public Administration. (AQW 8916/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Employees who have left the Health and Social Care under the Review of Public Administration Voluntary Early Retirement Scheme should have no expectation of re-employment in the HSC.

Mullinure Hospital

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he will ensure that additional capital expenditure is included in a full economic and financial appraisal of options for the future of Mullinure Hospital before he takes a decision on its future; and if he will make the information from the economic appraisal available to Armagh City and District Council. (AQW 8928/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: As I have recently stated, the Southern HSC Trust proposes that Mullinure will no longer provide non acute inpatient beds but no final decision has been made. In order to support that decision, the Trust will be required to develop the proposal in a business case in line with Green Book guidance. That business case will examine the economic and financial implications of all options being considered.

The Trust has and will continue, where appropriate, to liaise with relevant stakeholders including Armagh City and District Council when developing their proposals.

NHS Dentists

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, following the announcement of £17 million investment to provide 38 additional dentists, when the new NHS dentists for Donaghadee and Bangor will be in place. (AQW 8929/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Under the terms of the contract with Oasis Dental Care Ltd, new dental practices will open over a 12 month period, commencing in autumn this year.

Alleged Child Abuse

Mr D Ford asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if his Department has any plans to investigate any claims of alleged child abuse carried out in any institution in Northern Ireland. (AQW 8932/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Within Northern Ireland, the statutory framework requires that where allegations of child abuse come to light these must be reported immediately to PSNI and

Social Services for investigation. I would encourage anyone who has any information regarding any allegations of child abuse to report these immediately to the PSNI and Social Services for investigation so that perpetrators can be brought before the courts where this is appropriate.

Under current legislative procedures in Northern Ireland individuals who wish to work in a paid or unpaid capacity with children in a regulated position will be subject to pre-employment vetting procedures. Information regarding individuals who have harmed a child or placed a child at risk of harm will be considered with a view to placing that individual on a disqualification list thereby preventing them from working with children in the future. Individuals placed on disqualification lists have the right of appeal to the independent Care Tribunal.

The introduction of new Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups legislation later this year will further strengthen protection for children and vulnerable adults in workplace situations. These new safeguarding arrangements will help to meet Government's commitment to increasing public protection by significantly extending the range of activities and workplaces from which individuals may be barred from working with children and vulnerable adults. Consequently, many more individuals than at present who may pose a risk to children or vulnerable adults can be removed from the workplace.

My Department also intends to bring forward legislation next year to establish a regional, independently-chaired Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland. The Board will ultimately replace the four non-statutory Area Child Protection Committees and will have a duty to make arrangements to safeguard the welfare of children and young people. There will be a duty for relevant agencies to make arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and to co-operate to improve the well being of children. This measure will strengthen further safeguarding arrangements within Northern Ireland.

Childcare Groups

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what departmental support is available to school age childcare groups. (AQW 8933/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department does not provide support to school age childcare groups but acts as a funding conduit for monies secured for this sector by OFMDFM.

Childcare Organisations

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail funding provided to (i) pre-school childcare organisations; and (ii) school age childcare organisations, in each of the last five years. (AQW 8934/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department has provided support to the pre-school childcare sector through PEACE II funding and has acted as a funding conduit for EU funding Peace measure 1.5 to the school age childcare sector. Funding to pre-school groups under PEACE II started in 2001. By March 2006 the grants had been largely discharged.

The table below details funding provided to pre-school childcare organisations and school age childcare organisations via my Department in each of the last five years.

Financial Year	Pre-school childcare organisations funding	School age childcare organisations funding
2004/2005	£2,832,645	
2005/2006	£1,723,937	
2006/2007	£745,280	£696,000 (July 06 – March 07)
2007/2008	£30,714	£905,320
2008/2009	£34,815	£907,858

Dress Code for Hospital Staff

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if instructions on dress code for hospital staff issued by his Department is advisory or mandatory. (AQW 8938/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Regional Dress Code Policy is guidance.

It was published by my department in February 2008 and issued to HSC Trusts by the CMO and CNO with the specific recommendation that the dress code policy should be implemented immediately.

Prescription Deliveries

Mr M Brady asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, with regard to prescriptions delivered to patients' doors, what protocols has his Department put in place to ensure that elderly people, who may find it difficult to get to the door, get their prescription. (AQW 8941/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: With regard to prescriptions delivered to patients, my Department has no protocols in place to ensure that the elderly, who may find it difficult to get to the door, get their prescriptions. However, as a first step the Board has sought to meet with the Pharmaceutical Contractors Committee (PCC), the representative body of community pharmacy in Northern Ireland to discuss this matter and to consider whether it could be addressed through the development and issuing of good practice guidelines.

Many pharmacies in Northern Ireland choose to offer and operate a free independent collection and delivery service for their patients on request. However, the Board does not commission delivery services nor do they remunerate pharmacists for the provision of such.

The Pharmaceutical Society for Northern Ireland have developed a Code of Ethics for pharmacists providing a collection and delivery service. The Code places a professional responsibility on a pharmacist to ensure that the patient or their carer knows how to use the prescribed medication safely, effectively and appropriately and to check that they are not experiencing adverse effects or compliance difficulties. The Code of Ethics also details that wherever possible a pharmacist should obtain a signature to indicate safe receipt of the prescribed medicine. Pharmacists who contravene the Society's Code of Ethics are subject to the Society's own disciplinary processes, the ultimate sanction being removal from the Register of Pharmacists.

Macular Degeneration

Mrs N Long asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what actions his Department is taking to increase staffing levels within the Mater Hospital's Macular Service to treat first eye Macular Degeneration patients. (AQW 8943/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I have allocated additional funding of £39.1 million over the period 2008-2011 to improve access to new drugs and treatments, including Lucentis for wet age related macular degeneration. The Belfast Health and Social Care Trust is in the process of expanding its macular service to provide treatment with Lucentis in line with National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence guidance, including recruitment of the necessary staff.

Legislative Framework for Mental Capacity and Mental Health Legislation in Northern Ireland

Dr S Farry asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to report on the responses to the Department's consultation on the Legislative Framework for Mental Capacity and Mental Health Legislation in Northern Ireland, including detailing the number and percentage of respondents who argued for a single piece of legislation rather than two separate bills. (AQW 8944/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There have been 76 responses from a broad range of government, professional and voluntary organisations and a number of individuals. In total 27 respondents, which represent approximately 35% of responses received, indicated support for a single Bill encompassing both mental capacity and mental health provisions rather than in separate legislation.

Legislative Framework for Mental Capacity and Mental Health Legislation in Northern Ireland

Dr S Farry asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline (i) what conclusions his Department has drawn from the consultation on the Legislative Framework for Mental Capacity and Mental Health Legislation in Northern Ireland; and (ii) his plans for future legislation in this area. (AQW 8945/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Public consultation on a 'Legislative Framework for Mental Capacity and Mental Health Legislation in Northern Ireland' was completed 31 March 09. The outcome of consultation is currently under consideration and a decision on future legislation will be taken by the Executive.

Frameworks for Minor Works Consultancy Services

Mr D O'Loan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why an amendment was made to the pre-qualification questionnaire for Frameworks for Minor Works Consultancy Services to allow an architectural practice with four or more chartered members to reclassify as building surveyors. (AQW 8948/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The amendment was made in order to recognise the fact that architectural practices may, in the course of everyday business, provide both architectural and building surveying services.

South Tyrone and Lurgan Hospitals

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the expenditure incurred in the last twelve months to make non-acute in-patient facilities at South Tyrone and Lurgan Hospitals fit for purpose. (AQW 8962/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Southern HSC Trust has advised me that capital of £300k was spent at South Tyrone Hospital in 2008/09 although this was not related to any future service proposals. There was no capital expenditure at Lurgan Hospital over that period.

DEPARTMENT FOR REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Northern Ireland Water

Mr A McQuillan asked the Minister for Regional Development how Northern Ireland Water is compliant with the working time directive as it has re-structured into three areas and has reduced staff thereby increasing the workload of the remaining staff. (AQW 5843/09)

Minister for Regional Development (Mr C Murphy): I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that the restructuring process was implemented following a review which identified the most effective and cost efficient delivery of services to customers. It includes the introduction of new ways of working which has resulted in the need for fewer staff. As there has been no increase in workload for those staff remaining, NIW is satisfied that it continues to monitor and improve controls on compliance with the Working Time Directive.

Northern Ireland Water

Mr A McQuillan asked the Minister for Regional Development if the welfare of staff has been taken into consideration in the re-structuring of Northern Ireland Water. (AQW 5844/09)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that the welfare of staff was considered a high priority during the implementation of its restructuring proposals. Detailed communication was undertaken with all directly affected employees on a wide range of issues including the

rationale for the restructuring, new ways of working, grades and locations. In addition, extensive redeployment opportunities were offered within the company and volunteers were sought for early release schemes.

Throughout the process, employees had the opportunity to speak to a number of contacts within NIW who were made available to provide staff support and to address any concerns raised.

Bus Lanes

Mr P Butler asked the Minister for Regional Development to show how effective bus lanes have been in (i) increasing the number of people using public transport; and (ii) reducing the number of private cars being used on the roads. (AQW 8562/09)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Ports and Public Transport Division has advised that in the autumn 2007 Passenger's Charter survey of bus users, 14% of Metro and 9% of Ulsterbus passengers indicated that they were encouraged to use buses due to the availability of bus lanes alone, or by bus lanes in conjunction with other factors, such as, increased frequency of buses.

It has also been highlighted, by my Department's Roads Service, that the increases in public transport usage cannot solely be attributed to the provision of bus lanes. There are many other factors involved which contribute to public transport becoming a more attractive alternative for non essential car users. These include:-

- the provision of bus shelters, many of which are equipped with real time passenger information;
- bus priority at a number signalised junctions, giving extra green time to buses which are running more than two minutes late; and
- park and ride facilities with dedicated bus services.

In addition to these factors, the introduction of Translink's Metro services has led to enhanced, more frequent services. The new accessible bus fleet is also a factor in the increase in the patronage of buses. The introduction of the concessionary fares scheme has also proved to be very popular.

Car ownership has been increasing by 4% per annum over the last few years, but it is not possible to assess the effect of the provision of bus lanes on this figure.

Nevertheless, it is recognised that the use of public transport makes very effective use of available road space. On the Lisburn Road for example, approximately 33% of people in transit during the morning peak period, travel on public transport. However, the buses account for only 2% of the traffic on the road at this time. My Department will therefore, continue to highlight these benefits and promote the use of public transport, in an effort to make it more appealing to non essential car users.

Belfast Rapid Transport System

Mr D Kinahan asked the Minister for Regional Development, to outline the way in which the Belfast Rapid Transport Project is being advanced with particular reference to future upgrades in light rail. (AQW 8602/09)

Minister for Regional Development: Rapid Transit Division within my department will be following the recommendations of the Strategic Outline Case in future-proofing the network, including making turning circles available and ensuring gradients are not too steep to support a migration to light rail. One possibility for the future migration of the network would be the TVR (Transport sur Voie Réservée) approach, which uses a single track bus guidance mechanism.

There would, however, need to be a significant rise in passenger numbers to justify the migration to light rail in Belfast.

Belfast Rapid Transport System

Mr D Kinahan asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the proposed forward work programme for the Belfast Rapid Transport System. (AQW 8603/09)

Minister for Regional Development: Rapid Transit Division within my department has recently undertaken a market sounding exercise, which will be reported to me when complete, and will inform the detailed forward

work programme of the division. This forward work programme will include a number of distinct projects, such as: Rapid Transit legislation, design and procurement of vehicles, design and procurement of infrastructure, and appointment of an operator.

Belfast Rapid Transport System

Mr D Kinahan asked the Minister for Regional Development which recommendations of the Belfast Rapid Transport scheme Strategic Outline Case the Minister has not accepted. (AQW 8604/09)

Minister for Regional Development: I accepted all the recommendations of the Strategic Outline Case and my decision to proceed to implementation was endorsed by the Executive in November 2008.

Rapid Transit Division within my Department are currently carrying out detailed survey work on all the route options to confirm the preferred routes identified in the Strategic Outline Case.

Illegal Signage

Mr B Wilson asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) how many charges have been made Roads Service for the removal of illegal signage; and (ii) are the charges related to (a) voluntary; or (b) commercial organisations, broken down by Council area, in each of the last three years. (AQW 8623/09)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it is estimated that around 99% of the invoices to recover costs are issued to commercial organisations. Unfortunately, information is not available in an easily accessible format, to break the figures down by Council area.

The number of requests, or invoices that Roads Service has issued, for costs incurred, for the removal of illegal signage is set out in the table below.

Details of Invoices for Illegal Signage				
Year	06/07	07/08	08/09	Grand Total
Total	707*	1463	852	3,022

* 06/07 year covers the period from Oct 06 - Mar 07 as Roads Service Debt function was centralised at this time.

I should further advise that the information in this table covers the period since October 2006, when details of payments in relation to illegal signage was centralised. Figures prior to this period are not available.

South Antrim Constituency

Mr T Burns asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the work planned by Roads Service and NI Water to be carried out in the South Antrim constituency, in July and August 2009. (AQW 8637/09)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the following work will be undertaken in the South Antrim Constituency during July and August 2009:

- Traffic calming at Ollardale Park / Hawthorne Way, Ballyclare;
- replacement of street lighting at Toberdowney Park/Drive/Avenue/Gardens, Ballynure;
- replacement of street lighting at Downey Bungalows, Ballynure;
- replacement of street lighting at Manse Walk/Rise/Court, New Mossley;
- replacement of street lighting at Carn Green, New Mossley;
- erection of signage for cycle lane/track at Bridge Road/Hawthorn Road, Newtownabbey;
- construction of storm sewer and new footway at Park Road, Mallusk;
- construction of extension to M2 off slip lane to Scullions Road;
- carriageway resurfacing at Monkstown Road; Newtownabbey;
- carriageway resurfacing at Carnmoney Road, Newtownabbey;
- carriageway resurfacing at Mill Road, Ballyclare,

- carriageway resurfacing at Ransevyn Road, Whitehead;
- traffic Calming at Toome;
- traffic Calming in Rathenraw Estate, Antrim;
- construction of footway link at Clonboy Walk, Randalstown;
- carriageway resurfacing at Donegore Drive, Antrim;
- carriageway resurfacing at Rossvale, Antrim;
- carriageway resurfacing at Church Road, Randalstown;
- carriageway resurfacing at Massereene Street, Antrim;
- carriageway resurfacing at Old Lough Road, Antrim;
- carriageway resurfacing at Dublin Road, Antrim;
- carriageway resurfacing at Ballynoe Road, Antrim;
- carriageway resurfacing at Crosskeen Road, Antrim; and
- carriageway resurfacing at Bridge Park, Templepatrick.

Roads Service will also carry out routine maintenance work on roads in the South Antrim constituency during July and August 2009.

Northern Ireland Water has advised of the following work to be carried out in the South Antrim Constituency during July and August 2009:

- New and replacement water mains – Munie Road/Straidkilly, Larne;
- reservoir Rehabilitation Pre-inspection Programme – Newtownabbey, Carrickfergus;
- realignment of existing water mains, sewers and pumping main – A2 Shore Road, Carrickfergus;
- installation of pumps and control panel – Glenarm Sewage Pumping Station;
- completion of contract following installation of new foul sewer – Victoria Road, Ballyclare;
- Drainage Area Plan and replacement of overflow pipe to alleviate flooding problems – Joymount, Carrickfergus;
- Drainage Area Plan – Whitehouse, Carrickfergus;
- cleaning and repairs to storm system – Manse Road, Camross Park and Merville Mews, Newtownabbey;
- extension to foul and storm sewer – Antrim Road, Mallusk; and
- priority upgrades to Small Wastewater Treatment Works – Newtownabbey, Carrickfergus and Larne.

This work is in addition to the day-to-day maintenance and repair required to the water and sewerage network.

Punctuality of Trains

Mr R Beggs asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the punctuality records for trains from Belfast to (i) Greenisland; (ii) Carrickfergus; (iii) Whitehead; and (iv) Larne, in the last year.(AQW 8672/09)

Minister for Regional Development: Translink have advised me that they do not record the punctuality of services at each individual station i.e. for arrival and departure. However, consistent with the Passenger's Charter, they measure the punctuality of trains on each line of the rail network. The Larne line punctuality statistics are presented in the table below. A 26-week average figure is also provided. For reference, the punctuality target in the Passenger's Charter for the Larne line is that 95% of trains arrive no more than 5 minutes late.

LARNE LINE PUNCTUALITY (PERCENTAGE OF TRAINS ARRIVING NO MORE THAN 5 MINUTES LATE)

Larne line punctuality 2008 – 2009			
Period 1	96.83%	26 week average	93.76%
Period 2	95.41%	26 week average	94.55%
Period 3	96.98%	26 week average	95.16%
Period 4	96.73%	26 week average	95.57%

Larne line punctuality 2008 – 2009			
Period 5	96.33%	26 week average	95.95%
Period 6	96.53%	26 week average	96.49%
Period 7	93.33%	26 week average	95.95%
Period 8	92.11%	26 week average	95.44%
Period 9	91.79%	26 week average	94.48%
Period 10	96.83%	26 week average	94.45%
Period 11	95.89%	26 week average	94.41%
Period 12	96.74%	26 week average	94.45%
Larne line punctuality 2009 – 2010			
Period 1	98.14%	26 week average	95.20%
Period 2	96.86%	26 week average	95.94%
Period 3	97.91%	26 week average	97.08%

NI Water Grassed Areas

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the total grassed area maintained by NI Water; and (ii) the total cost to NI Water of maintaining their grassed areas. (AQW 8687/09)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that it does not specifically maintain any grassed areas within its sites to lawn standard therefore it has no costs associated with the maintenance of such areas.

Public Hire Taxis

Mr D Kinahan asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the findings, pertaining specifically to public hire taxis in Belfast, of any recent customer research surveys carried out on behalf of Translink. (AQW 8688/09)

Minister for Regional Development: Translink has informed me that it has not carried out any customer research specifically relating to the issue of public hire taxis. However, a recent internal exercise carried out in association with Iarnród Éireann highlighted that some rail travellers had expressed concerns about taxi drivers touting for business at Central Station. This is an internal operational matter for Translink and I have no plans to publish this information.

Central Railway Station

Mr D Kinahan asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail any correspondence between his Department and the Department of the Environment and its agencies, with regard to problems caused by public hire taxis at Central Railway Station, Belfast. (AQW 8689/09)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service is responsible for parking enforcement against vehicles, including public hire taxis, parked in contravention of waiting restrictions. This work is undertaken by Traffic Attendants employed by NSL Services Group (NSL), formerly NCP Services Ltd. When a vehicle is not parked in contravention of any marked restriction, but deemed to be causing an obstruction, the PSNI may take enforcement action.

I am advised that parking enforcement issues, including those relating to public hire taxis, are discussed at meetings between my Department's officials and various stakeholders, including the PSNI. The PSNI are also represented on the newly formed Belfast Taxi Forum that has been initiated by Roads Service.

Public Hire Taxis

Mr D Kinahan asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail any correspondence between his Department and its agencies, and the PSNI with regard to penalising public hire taxi drivers who block roads and footpaths. (AQW 8692/09)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service is responsible for parking enforcement against vehicles, including public hire taxis, parked in contravention of waiting restrictions. This work is undertaken by Traffic Attendants employed by NSL Services Group (NSL), formerly NCP Services Ltd. When a vehicle is not parked in contravention of any marked restriction, but deemed to be causing an obstruction, the PSNI may take enforcement action.

I am advised that parking enforcement issues, including those relating to public hire taxis, are discussed at meetings between my Department's officials and various stakeholders, including the PSNI. The PSNI are also represented on the newly formed Belfast Taxi Forum that has been initiated by Roads Service.

Public Hire Taxis

Mr D Kinahan asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail any correspondence between his Department and its agencies, and National Car Parks with regard to penalising public hire taxi drivers who block roads and footpaths. (AQW 8694/09)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service is responsible for parking enforcement against vehicles, including public hire taxis, parked in contravention of waiting restrictions. This work is undertaken by Traffic Attendants employed by NSL Services Group (NSL), formerly NCP Services Ltd. When a vehicle is not parked in contravention of any marked restriction, but deemed to be causing an obstruction, the PSNI may take enforcement action.

Appropriate and effective parking enforcement issues, including taxi enforcement, are discussed at regular meetings between Roads Service and NSL. In addition, NSL and my Department's officials have met with other relevant bodies, to specifically discuss taxi enforcement issues.

Public Hire Taxis

Mr D Kinahan asked the Minister for Regional Development what position his Department takes on public hire taxis parking outside official ranks and blocking traffic in Belfast. (AQW 8697/09)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service is responsible for parking enforcement against vehicles, including public hire taxis, parked in contravention of waiting restrictions. This work is undertaken by Traffic Attendants employed by NSL Services Group (NSL), formerly NCP Services Ltd. When a vehicle is not parked in contravention of any marked restriction, but deemed to be causing an obstruction, the PSNI may take enforcement action.

Appropriate and effective parking enforcement, including public hire taxis enforcement, is discussed at regular meetings between Roads Service and NSL. In addition, NSL and my Department's officials have met with other relevant bodies, to specifically discuss taxi enforcement issues.

Roads Service has advised that public hire taxis, parking outside official taxi ranks, are subject to the normal waiting restrictions in force in that area. However, there are difficulties associated with issuing a Penalty Charge Notice (PCN) to public hire taxis that are parked in contravention of waiting restrictions. Generally, taxi drivers remain in, or close to, their vehicles and drive away when a traffic attendant approaches, before any enforcement has taken place.

Free Parking for Drivers with Disabilities

Mrs C McGill asked the Minister for Regional Development if there are any plans to introduce free parking for drivers with disabilities. (AQW 8712/09)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service operates the Blue Badge Scheme, to assist those with mobility difficulties. The scheme allows holders of a valid blue badge, who display it properly, to park on-street, close to the facilities and services they need so as to improve their lifestyle, independence and freedom of choice.

More specifically by using the blue badge, when parking on public roads, holders can:-

- park in parking bays specifically marked for use by people with disabilities, which are generally provided next to the main shopping areas;
- park free of charge and without time limit on-street, where parking is charged for, unless a time limit indicates otherwise;
- park on single or double yellow lines for up to three hours except:-
 - where there is a ban on loading and unloading;
 - within the limits of a ticketed (pay and display) parking area; or
 - within 15 metres of a junction.

The legislation covering the Blue Badge scheme does not extend to off-street car parking. Generally, off-street car parks do not offer the same level of proximity to town or city centres as on-street parking facilities. Therefore, the demand for parking, from Blue Badge holders, in off-street car parks, is much lower. However, blue badge holders can park in the bays specifically marked for use by people with disabilities in Roads Service car parks. These bays are provided in all Roads Service car parks and are generally located at the main pedestrian exit and entrance points.

Public Hire Taxis

Mr D Kinahan asked the Minister for Regional Development if his Department has investigated the activity of public hire taxi drivers at Central Station, Belfast. (AQW 8725/09)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that parking enforcement issues, including those relating to the operation of public hire taxis at Belfast's Central Railway Station, are discussed at meetings between my Department's officials and our parking enforcement contractor, NSL Service Group (NSL). In addition, both NSL and my Department's officials have been working closely with other stakeholders, including DOE, PSNI and taxi representatives, in an attempt to resolve these issues.

Ards Peninsula Road Maintenance

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development how much money remains for the maintenance of roads in the Ards Peninsula; and when maintenance will be carried out to bring these to a reasonable standard.. (AQW 8729/09)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service presented the 2009/10 Annual Programme of Works for the Ards Borough Council area on 22 June 2009. This report outlined an extensive range of works, for the entire Ards Borough Council area, amounting to expenditure of some £5.2 million.

The Structural Maintenance element of this expenditure is in the region of £2 million. All work will be completed in the 2009/10 financial year.

The Council report can be viewed online at:

www.roadsni.gov.uk/index/publications/publications-council_reports.htm

Unfortunately, it is not possible to indicate how much of the maintenance expenditure for the Ards Borough Council area will go specifically to work in the Ards Peninsula.

Ballymena to Coleraine Railway Track

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development if the re-lay of the Ballymena to Coleraine railway track came in on budget. (AQW 8745/09)

Minister for Regional Development: Whilst the railway line did re-open as planned on Monday 29 June, the project is still in its latter stages of completion and final accounts are therefore not ready. Translink have advised, however, that all indications are that the project will come in within budget and is likely to be significantly ahead of timetable.

Parking Ticket Machines

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister for Regional Development how many parking ticket machines there are in Northern Ireland. (AQW 8746/09)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that there are 471 pay and display machines used in our off-street car parks and on-street charging zones across the North.

Parking Ticket Machines

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail how many parking ticket machines have broken down in each of the last 5 years; and the cost to repair these problems. (AQW 8747/09)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it does not retain information in a format that allows them to detail the number of pay and display machines that have experienced a fault in each of the last five years. However, Roads Service has advised that, in 2008, there were 402 machines that experienced at least one fault that rendered them out of order.

Maintenance of pay and display machines in a working condition is a Key Performance Indicator in Roads Service's contract with NSL Services Group (NSL). NSL's performance in this area is being measured against fault response times detailed in the contract and will be continually monitored by Roads Service. The total annual cost, paid to NSL for providing this service, is currently £247,670.64 or £525.84 per machine.

I am further advised that there have been several recent incidents when machines have been criminally damaged, and this may result in additional costs to my Department.

Flags in Bangor Town Centre

Dr S Farry asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the level of complaints received regarding the erection of flags on Roads Service lampposts in Bangor Town Centre. (AQW 8789/09)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that they have not received any complaints from the public, in relation to flags on lampposts in Bangor Town Centre.

Flags in Bangor Town Centre

Dr S Farry asked the Minister for Regional Development what actions the Roads Service is taking to remove flags erected on lampposts in Bangor Town Centre without the permission of that agency. (AQW 8790/09)

Minister for Regional Development: By way of background, I should explain that in April 2005 my Department's Roads Service signed up to the Government's multi agency protocol about the display of flags in public areas. Roads Service has, through written submissions and attendance at review meetings, contributed to the review of the "The Joint Protocol", initiated by OFMDFM in April 2008.

I understand that completion of the flags protocol review is subject to progress of work undertaken by OFMDFM, to review and refresh the current "A Shared Future" policy and "Racial Equality" strategy.

It is my view that the current protocols are outdated and need to be reviewed by all partner agencies and departments, including DSD, DOE, OFMDFM, DRD and the PSNI. I can also advise that I met Chief Constable, Sir Hugh Orde, PSNI, in relation to the role that the Police must play by way of enforcement, in addition to the work of other agencies, such as Roads Service.

The aim of the current protocol is to provide a pro-active approach, with the support of communities and their representatives, to address the removal of flags from arterial routes and town centres and from particular locations, such as interface areas, or near schools, hospitals and churches.

The protocol recognises that an effective resolution to the flags issue is more likely to be achieved through the co-operation of local communities. It will require widespread community support for the partnership established by the protocol to be effective. The Agency that is in the most effective position to consult, negotiate, or resolve the situation, will take the lead. The PSNI, where best placed, will do this. The PSNI will also take the lead where the display of flags is causing community tension, or is affecting the quality of life for a community.

Under the protocol Roads Service, when called upon by the lead Agency, will provide the access equipment and resources to remove unwanted flags, once agreement has been reached that they should be taken down, but the community cannot reach them easily.

Roads Service has advised that, in accordance with the current joint protocol, following receipt of your questions, Roads Service officials contacted the PSNI who advised that any action to remove these flags is unlikely to be successful at this time, and could lead to a proliferation of flags in the area.

Flags In Bangor Town Centre

Dr S Farry asked the Minister for Regional Development for the Roads Service's assessment regarding the level of community support or otherwise for the flags erected on lampposts in Bangor Town Centre.

(AQW 8791/09)

Minister for Regional Development: As outlined in my response to AQW 8790/09, my Department's Roads Service has signed up to the multi agency protocol about the display of flags in public areas, that was launched by the Government in April 2005. The protocol recognises that an effective resolution to the flags issue is more likely to be achieved through the co-operation of local communities. The Agency that is in the most effective position to consult, negotiate or resolve the situation, will take the lead.

As I have previously indicated, it is my view that, while the current protocols may achieve successful resolution to these flag issues in some areas, the current protocols are outdated and need to be reviewed by all partner agencies and departments, including DSD, DOE, OFMdfM, DRD and the PSNI.

On the matter of assessing the level of community support, Roads Service will take advice from its partners.

Removal of Flags

Dr S Farry asked the Minister for Regional Development what protocols are in place for liaison with the Police Service of Northern Ireland with regard to seeking their assistance in removing flags from Roads Service property.

(AQW 8793/09)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that under the terms of the current Joint Protocol, outlined in my response to AQW 8790/09, each partner has agreed to provide relevant and necessary information to other partner agencies, to support actions being taken in relation to flags issues.

In the case of liaison between Roads Service and the PSNI, contact is normally between the local street lighting engineer and a nominated senior officer in the appropriate PSNI District Command Unit.

Portrush NI Railway Station

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development if he will be seeking an urgent meeting with Coleraine Borough Council to ensure that disabled toilet facilities at Portrush NI Railway Station are upgraded as a matter of priority.

(AQW 8810/09)

Minister for Regional Development: I do not intend to seek an urgent meeting with Coleraine Borough Council regarding the disabled toilet facilities at Portrush Railway Station. The toilet facilities at the Portrush station are the responsibility of Translink. My previous answer (AWQ 8424/09) on this subject referred to advice provided by Translink that Coleraine Borough Council were considering a Masterplan for Portrush town. Translink have further informed me that the Masterplan proposes shortening the railway and moving the

station back up the line approximately 250m to open up the sea front for amenities along that section of the town. Therefore, to avoid the risk of any nugatory spend, Translink are awaiting further details relating to this proposal. When these are received Translink will consider appropriate next steps.

Flooding on Roads

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development if his Department holds records of where flooding spots are on roads; and if there is a policy to draw up a work schedule to investigate and fix the problem areas. (AQW 8813/09)

Minister for Regional Development: Responsibility for drainage infrastructure is shared between my Department and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development through, Rivers Agency, Roads Service and Northern Ireland Water (NIW). These three agencies have formulated procedures, for liaison and co-ordination of the emergency response, resulting in the production of Best Practice Guidelines and Flooding Hotspots lists.

The combined flooding hotspots register includes a list of key flooding locations across the North, identified by NIW, Roads Service and Rivers Agency. The list also identifies the agency which should take the lead, during a flooding event, for each location. The combined flooding hotspots list is continually updated as new locations are reported, or problem locations rectified. However, the flooding problems at these locations are not always easy to resolve, as remedial work may be prohibitively expensive or the solution may not be immediately obvious and may require further investigation or consultation with other Departments or adjacent landowners.

In addition to the hotspots register, each Roads Service Section Office also identifies areas which are regularly affected by minor flooding in their area. A programme of works is prepared by each office to undertake remedial measures at the areas identified, on a priority basis.

GPS Tracking System

Mr J McCallister asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 8472/09, if he will elaborate on his answer, addressing specifically why punctuality statistics from the GPS tracking system are not collected by Translink. (AQW 8848/09)

Minister for Regional Development: I have nothing further to add to my earlier answer. I am informed by Translink that vehicles have been fitted with GPS equipment to identify fare stages for ticketing purposes. This does not constitute a vehicle tracking system.

GPS Tracking System

Mr J McCallister asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 8500/09, if his answer indicates a response in the negative in relation to the question asked i.e. whether the road position of buses is sent to a central point by the GPS tracking system. (AQW 8850/09)

Minister for Regional Development: I have nothing further to add to my earlier answers. I am informed by Translink that vehicles have been fitted with GPS equipment to identify fare stages for ticketing purposes. This does not constitute a vehicle tracking systems.

Compensation Claims

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development what processes his Department has in place to deal with compensation claims for damage to private vehicles caused during road repairs. (AQW 8871/09)

Minister for Regional Development: The process for dealing with compensation claims arising from damage to private vehicles caused during road repairs is the same for any claim arising from damage or injury on the road or footpath. The claim should be submitted, preferably using the Department's claim form, to the Department for Regional Development Central Claims Unit. The Unit investigates the claim and notifies the claimant of the result of that investigation.

If the road repairs were carried out by a Contractor on behalf of the Department, it is likely the claim would be referred to that Contractor because the contract contains a clause indemnifying the Department against claims arising from the Contractor's works.

This stage of the claim is the initial, informal and free of charge, stage of the legal process of suing the Department for breach of statutory duty. If the claimant is aggrieved by the Department's decision on the claim, that decision may be challenged in court through the next, formal, stage of the legal process.

Gortcorbies Climbing Lane Project

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the progress of the Gortcorbies climbing lane project. (AQW 8872/09)

Minister for Regional Development: As the Member will be aware, My Departments Roads Service has been examining options for the appropriate disposal of the large volume of surplus material, which will result from the construction of the proposed scheme. It has proved very challenging to find a cost effective location for the disposal of this surplus material, within the Benevenagh Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and a solution has not yet been found.

In these circumstances, I am unable to provide a date for commencement of this scheme.

Car Parking Facilities

Mr R McCartney asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail all car parking facilities under DRD ownership within the Derry City Council area. (AQW 8889/09)

Minister for Regional Development: The table below lists the 14 public car parking facilities, within the Derry City Council area, which are owned by my Department:

DRD Car Parks in the Derry City Council area	
Alfred Street car park	Railway Station car park
Altnagelvin car park (Belt Road)	Shantallow Health Centre car park
Carlisle Road car park	Simpson's Brae car park
Claudy Market Yard car park	Spencer Road car park
Fahan Street car park (Lisfannon Park)	Strand Road car park
Foyle Road car park	Victoria Market car park
Queens Quay car park (North & South)	William Street car park

Sewage Treatment Works

Mr A Ross asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) in how many cases has NI Water been required to provide secondary treatment of sewage where the population served by the sewage treatment works was less than 10,000 people; and (ii) to detail all of the sewage treatment works where NI Water has provided secondary treatment in which the population served was less than 10,000. (AQW 8902/09)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that it has provided secondary treatment at 745 locations where the population equivalent served is less than 10,000. Details of all sewage works where NIW has provided secondary treatment are provided below.

Name of WwTWs	Name of WwTWs	Name of WwTWs
Abbacy Road	Cullaville	Leeke Road
Acton	Cullion (Bready)	Legacurry (Down)
Aghadrumsee	Cullyhanna	Legacurry (Tyrone)

Name of WwTWs	Name of WwTWs	Name of WwTWs
Aghagallon	Cullyramer	Legaghory
Aghalee	Curglasson	Legatirriff
Aghanloo (1)	Curran	Leitrim (New)
Aghinlig	Darkley	Lessans
Aghnagar	Darragh Cross	Letterbin
Aghnaskew	Dartress	Letterbreen
Aghory	Davagh Park	Letterkeen
Agivey Road(199-201)	Deffrick	Limestone (2)
Aikens Town parks	Dempsey Park	Lisbarnet
Aird	Dernaflaw	Lisbellaw
Altamuskin	Derryaghna	Liscolman
Altishane	Derrycrin	Lisdoart (1)
Altmore	Derrygonnelly	Lisdoart (2)
Altnahinch	Derrygortrevey	Lisdown
Altnamackan	Derryhale	Lislea (NEW)
Annacloy	Derrykeighan	Lislea Terrace
Annaghugh	Derrylin	Lismoye
Annaghmore	Derrymore	Lisnadill
Annahilt	Derrynoose	Lisnagalt
Annsborough	Derrytrasna	Lisnagunogue
Anville Crescent	Dervock	Lisnahall
Ardess	Desertmartin	Lisnakilly
Ardgarvan	Diamond Road(73-79)	Lisnalea
Ardground	Diviny	Lisnamuck (Coleraine)
Ardlough Road (40-42)	Doan Place	Lisnamuck (Magherafelt)
Ardress	Donagh	Lisnaragh
Ardstraw	Donagheady	Lisnarrick
Armoy	Donaghey (1)	Lisnaskea
Arney	Donaghey (2)	Lisnevanagh
Artasooly	Donaghmore	Lisnisk
Artigarvan	Donard View	Lisowan
Arvalee	Donemana	Locard Park
Ashfield (Dromore)	Donnelly Park	Longfield (Eglinton)
Attical	Donnybrewer	Longfield (Moorside Villas)
Aughagash	Donnybrewer Road(99)	Longs Glebe
Aughakillymaud	Doogary	Lough Fea
Augher	Dooish	Lough Macrory
Aughil	Doorless	Lough Macrory
Aughnacleagh	Dorsy	Loughan Road (Tyrone)

Name of WwTws	Name of WwTws	Name of WwTws
Aughnacloy	Dougan place	Loughdian
Aughnavallog	Douglas Bridge	Loughgall
Ballee Road	Drapersfield	Loughguile
Ballee Road (75-83)	Draperstown	Loughries
Balleevy	Drennans Road(6)	Lower Ballinderry
Ballinderry Road (45-49) Antrim	Dromara Road (Lacken)	Lower Rashee Road (15-21)
Ballinlea Road(81)	Dromora	Luney
Ballinmallard	Dromore (Down)	Lurganare
Ballinrees	Dromore (Tyrone)	Lurgancahone Road(35-39)
Ballinteer	Dromore Highlands	Lurganville
Ballyagan	Drones	Macfin
Ballyardel	Drumagarner	Macosquin
Ballyavelin Road (133-135)	Drumagarner Road(212-218)	Madden
Ballybogie Road(7-9)	Drumalig Road(9-11)	Maghaberry
Ballybogy	Drumane	Maghera (Down)
Ballybrick	Drumaness	Maghera (L/Derry)
Ballycairn (Down)	Drumard (Antrim)	Magheracoltan
Ballycarry	Drumard (Tyrone)	Magherafelt Road(24-28)
Ballycassidy	Drumard Primate	Magherahoney
Ballycleagh	Drumaroad	Magheralin
Ballycorr Grove	Drumbeg	Magheramason
Ballycranbeg	Drumcroon	Magheramourne
Ballygarvigan	Drumenny	Magheraveely
Ballygawley	Drumflugh Road (75-77)	Maghernarhar
Ballygowan	Drumgay (1)	Maghery
Ballygowan Road(102-104)	Drumgay (2)	Maglion Terrace
Ballygowan Road(41-47)	Drumhillery	Managher
Ballygowans	Drumhirk	Manse Road (Antrim)
Ballygruby	Drumilly	Markethill
Ballyhacket	Drumintee	Marlaco Road
Ballyheather Road (121-123)	Drumkee	Martinstown
Ballyhome	Drumlegagh Church Road	Mayboy
Ballykelly (DOWN)	Drumlegagh Church Road (63-65)	Mayoghill
Ballykelly (L/Derry)	Drumlegagh Road South	McCandless Terrace
Ballykinler	Drumlough	McCleary
Ballylintagh (New)	Drumman Hill	McKinley Park
Ballymacallion	Drummond	McNally Park(1-6)
Ballymacawley	Drumnacannon Road(20-22)	Meigh
Ballymacnab	Drumnaferry	Middletown

Name of WwTws	Name of WwTws	Name of WwTws
Ballymacormick	Drumnakilly	Milltown (Aghory)
Ballymaderphy	Drumnascamph	Milltown (Benburb)
Ballymagorry	Drumquin	Milltown (Burndennet)
Ballymaguigan	Drumraighland	Milltown (Maghera)
Ballymarlagh	Drumreagh	Milltown (Maghera)
Ballymiscaw road (37-41)	Drumshambo	Minterburn Road(115-117)
Ballymonie	Drumsurn	Moira
Ballymoyer	Drumsurn Road (234-238)	Molenan
Ballynadolly	Drumullan	Monea
Ballynafie	Dunboe Road(75-77)	Moneybrannon Road(89)
Ballynagalliagh (Armagh)	Dundrod	Moneycanon
Ballynagard (Antrim)	Dundrum (Armagh)	Moneycarrie
Ballynahinch (Armagh)	Dundrum (Down)	Moneydig
Ballynahinch (Down)	Duneany	Moneyglass
Ballynamullan	Dungiven	Moneymore
Ballynease	Dungonnell	Moneyneany
Ballyquinn	Dungorbery	Moneyreagh
Ballyrashane Road(37-39)	Dunloy	Moneyscalp
Ballyrock	Dunmullan	Moneyslane
Ballyronan	Dunnamore	Monmurry
Ballyrone Road	Dunnyboe Road (85-93)	Montieth
Ballyrussell	Dunronan Road(25-27)	Moorfield
Ballytrim	Dyan	Moorfields
Ballyutoag	Edencrannon	Moss-side
Ballyvarley	Edenderry (Antrim)	Mossvale Terrace
Ballyveely	Edenderry (Tyrone)	Mountain View (Tullymurry)
Ballyvelton Road(23)	Edendoit Road(107-109)	Mountcastle
Ballyvelton Road(45-51)	Edenmore Road	Mountfield
Ballyvoy	Edenreagh Road(39-41)	Mounthill
Ballywalter(Retention Tank)	Edergoole Road (87-89)	Mountjoy (Dungannon)
Bankside Shinn	Ederney	Mountjoy (Omagh)
Bar Hall	Eglis (Armagh)	Mountnorris
Beagh	Eglis (Tyrone)	Movenis Road(17)
Bearney Road(55-61)	Ervey Road	Moy
Beech Hill South	Eskragh	Mulderg
Belcoo	Fallahogy	Mullaghbane (Forkhill)
Bellaghy	Farmacaffley	Mullaghglass (Antrim)
Bellany	Farranflugh	Mullaghglass (Newry)
Belleek (Armagh)	Feeny	Mullaghmore

Name of WwTWs	Name of WwTWs	Name of WwTWs
Belleek (Fermanagh)	Ferris Bay (50)	Mullanahoe
Belleek Septic Tank	Feumore	Mullans (Antrim)
Bells Hill	Fincarn	Mullans (Fermanagh)
Beltrim	Fintona	Mullynaburtlan
Benburb	Fivemiletown	Mullyroddan
Benone	Florencecourt	Munie
Benvardin Road	Foffanybane	Murdocks Lane(1-6)
Beragh	Foreglen Road (51-53)	Myroe
Blackscull	Forkhill	Navery Road
Blackwatertown	Fourmile	Newmills
Blaney	Galbally	Newmills Road(70-72)
Boghill	Gallrock	Newry Road Rathfriland (80-83)
Boghill Road(52-54)	Garrison	Newtownbutler
Bohulkin	Garryduff Road(112- 122)	Newtown-Crommelin
Bolea	Garvagh	Newtownhamilton
Boleran Road (Garvagh)	Garvagh	Newtownstewart
Bonds Glen Road (149-151)	Garvetagh	Nixons Corner
Bonds Glen Road (65-67)	Gilford	Noones Vale
Bonnanaboigh	Glack	Oghill (1)
Bovean	Glarryford	Old Green
Boveedy	Glasmullen	Oliver Plunkett Park
Bovevagh Road (37-41)	Glassdrumman (Armagh)	Orahilly Park
Brantry	Glassdrumman (Down)	Orritor
Bready	Glassdrummond	Orritor Craigs
Breaside Cottages(1-6)	Glen View (Down)	Owenbeg
Bregagh Road(56-58)	Glen Villas	Park
Bregagh Road(60-62)	Glenabbey	Parkgate
Bresagh	Glenavy	Plumbridge
Brisland Road(3-5)	Glenavy Road (Antrim)	Pomeroy
Broagh	Glenbush Road(31)	Pomeroy Road
Brockaghboy	Glenedra Road (109-111)	Portglenone
Brookeborough	Glenhead Road	Poundburn
Buckna	Glenmakeeran	Poyntzspass
Burnquarter	Glenmornan	Priestland
Bush	Glenoe	Procklis
Bushmills	Glenstaghey Road(11)	Racavan
Cabragh	Gorran Road (84)	Randalstown
Caheny	Gortaclady	Rasharkin
Caledon	Gortatray	Rathfriland

Name of WwTWs	Name of WwTWs	Name of WwTWs
Camus	Gortereghy	Ravarnet
Capecastle	Gortin (Tyrone)	Redford
Cappagh	Gortin Road(12)	Richill
Cargan	Gortnacross	Ringneill
Carmean	Gortnagross Road (38-40)	Ringneill Road(1-5)
Carnalbanagh	Gortnahey	Ringsend
Carnalea Road	Gortscreagan	Ritchies Villas
Carnan	Gosheden (1)	Riverside(16-20)
Carnanbane	Gosheden (2)	Robinsonstown
Carnbeg	Grange (Taylorstown)	Rock Cottages
Carneyhough	Grange Blundel	Rocktown
Carnlough Road	Grangemore	Rornashane
Carnteel Road (122-124)	Greenan	Rosscolban
Carricklongfield Road (21-23)	Greenans	Rosscor
Carrickmore	Greencastle (Tyrone)	Rosslea
Carricknaveagh	Greenhill	Roughfort
Carrigenagh	Greenville	Rousky
Carrontreemall	Greyabbey	Saintfield
Carrowclare	Greysteel	Saval More Cottages
Carrowdore	Grove Park	Scribbagh
Carrowreagh Road(68-70)	Gulladuff	Seacon
Castle Archdale	Hamiltonsbawn	Seaforde
Castlecaulfield	Hazelbank	Seagahan
Castledawson	Hillsborough	Seskinore
Castlederg	Hillside Road(7-9)	Sherrigrim
Castlemellan Lower	Hilltown	Shinn Road
Castlemellan Upper	Hilltown Road	Shinny Road(20-22)
Castlenagree	Hooks Corner	Silverbridge
Castletown	Inishmagh	Sion Mills
Castlewellan	Irvinestown	Skernahergney
Castor Bay	Jennys Lane	Skerry View
Caugh Hill	Jonesborough	Slaght
Causeway Road(122)	Katesbridge	Soldierstown
Causeway Road(15)	Keady (Armagh)	Spamount
Causeway Road(180)	Keady (Fermanagh)	Springfield
Cavanacaw	Keenaghan (1)	Springwell Cresent(1-6)
Cavanagrow	Keenaghan (2)	St Annes Terrace
Charlestown	Keenaghan (Tyrone)	St Bridgids Villas
Church Hill	Kesh	St James

Name of WwTWs	Name of WwTWs	Name of WwTWs
Churchfield Road	Kilbroney Park(1-4)	St Marys Terrace
Clabby	Kilclean Road (80-82)	St Patricks Villas
Clady (Tyrone)	Kilcoo	Stangmore
Cladymore	Kildress Terrace	Stewartstown
Clare	Kilgarrett	Stoneyford
Clarehill	Killaloo	Stradreagh
Claudy	Killeen (Armagh)	Straid (Ballymena)
Clogh	Killeen (Tyrone)	Strangford
Clogher	Killen	Stranocum
Clough	Killeter	Swatragh
Cloughmills	Killinchy	Tamlaght
Cloughy (Retention Tank)	Killinchy Road(96-100)	Tamlaght O Crilly
Cluntee (Richardson)	Killogue	Tamnaherin
Coagh	Killybaskey	Tamnamore
Commons School Road(8-10)	Killycurry Road(30-32)	Tartaraghan
Coneyisland	Killygore	Tattysallagh
Coole Glebe	Killylane	Teemore
Coolkeeran	Killyman	Teeraw
Coolnagoppoge	Killymuck	Tempo
Coragh	Killyrammer	The Loup
Corbet	Killysavan	The Rock
Corchoney Lane (2-4)	Kilmachugh	The Skeagh
Corcreechy Road	Kilmood	Thorney Glen
Corgary Cottages (New)	Kilmore (Armagh)	Tibaran Cottages
Corickbeg Road(15-17)	Kilmore (Down)	Tirquin
Corickmore	Kilrea	Toberkeagh
Corkill (Fermanagh)	Kilross	Tobermore
Corkill (Tyrone)	Kilskeery	Toome
Cornakessagh	Kiltubbrid	Torr Head
Corry	Kinallen	Trench Road (66-70)
Corvanaghan	Kinawley	Trillick
Craigavole	Kinego Cottages	Tromra
Craigmore Road(139 - 145)	Kinneyglass Road(87-89)	Tully
Craignasasonagh	Kinturk	Tullyard(Tyrone)
Craigyarren	Kircubbin	Tullyelmer
Cranfield(Antrim)	Knock Terrace	Tullygawley
Crankill	Knockanroe	Tullyleek
Creagh	Knockans	Tullymore Road (43-45)
Creaghcor	Knockbrack	Tullyreavy

Name of WwTWs	Name of WwTWs	Name of WwTWs
Crebarkey	Knockloughrim	Tullyroan
Creevangar	Knockmoyle	Tummery
Crew Bridge	Knocknagore	Tureagh
Crilly	Knocknarea Road	Turralskin
Cross Lane(9-22)	Knocknatavanna	Tursallagh
Crosskeys Road	Knockonny	Upper Ballinderry
Crossmaglen	Lack	Upper Cranlome Road
Crossnamoyle	Largy	Upperlands
Culbane	Laurelvale Road	Victoria Bridge
Culcrow	Lawrencetown	Waringsford
		Waringstown
		Waterfoot Road
		Whin Road (21-23)
		Woaghternerry

Road Maintenance

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister for Regional Development how much has been spent on roads maintenance in each of the last two years. (AQW 8911/09)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that expenditure on structural maintenance (resurfacing/strengthening, surface dressing, patching and structural drainage), in each of the last two years, is as follows:-

- 2007/08 - £77.3 million
- 2008/09 - £63 million

Church Water Charges

Mr T Gallagher asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the total monies collected through water charges from churches and church properties for the financial year 2008/09. (AQW 8913/09)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that the total monies collected in the financial year 2008/09 through water charges from church and church properties was £408,881.87.

Press and Public Relations Staff

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the number of staff employed in his Department's press and public relations department and their overall cost in each year from 2003/04 to 2008/09. (AQW 8930/09)

Minister for Regional Development:

2003/04

Principal Information Officer

Senior Information Officer

Administration Staff (x3)

Total: £140,815k

2004/05

Principal Information Officer
 Senior Information Officer (x2)
 Administration Staff (x2)

Total: £151,632k

2005/06

Principal Information Officer
 Senior Information Officer (x2)
 Administration Staff (x2)

Total: £161, 532k

2006/07

Principal Information Officer
 Senior Information Officer (x2)
 Information Officer
 Administration Staff (x2)

Total: £172,926k

2007/08

Principal Information Officer
 Senior Information Officer (x2)
 Administration Staff (x2)

Total: £199,729

2008/09

Principal Information Officer
 Senior Information Officer
 Assistant Information Officer
 Administration Staff (x2)

Total: £184,347

Cullybackey Through-pass and A26 Frosses Road

Mr D O'Loan asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the progress of (i) the Cullybackey through-pass; (ii) the A26 Frosses Road Dualling scheme; and (iii) if the Minister could confirm that these projects will be completed as soon as possible.. (AQW 8956/09)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the Cullybackey throughpass has not been included in a Roads Service works programme at this time. However, I can assure you that the provision of the Cullybackey throughpass, following on from the section to be constructed by the developer, will be kept under review. Roads Service has advised that this scheme will be considered for a future works programme, subject to rate of development, priority against other proposals, satisfactory progress through planning and land acquisition and the availability of funding, through the normal budgetary process.

In relation to the A26 Frosses Road Dualling, I can advise that I announced the preferred route for this scheme, in August 2008. The scheme is currently being taken through the third stage of the three-stage scheme assessment process. This will culminate in the publication of an Environmental Statement and draft Orders, for planning and land acquisition, which I would anticipate occurring next year.

I can confirm that the A26 project will be completed as soon as possible, subject to satisfactory progress through the statutory orders and the availability of finance through the normal budgetary process.

Completion of West Tyrone Projects

Mr P Doherty asked the Minister for Regional Development provide a timeline for the completion of (i) carriageway and footpath improvements on the Mountfield Road between the junction with St Mary's Road and Oakland Road, Killyclougher; (ii) the road realignment scheme on Farmhill Road, Killyclougher; (iii) the construction of a pedestrian bridge in Beragh; and (iv) repairs to the Corkill Road from Seskinore to Clougher. (AQW 8959/09)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that, in relation to the completion of the carriageway and footpath on the Old Mountfield Road, between the junction with St. Mary's Road and Oakland Road, work is scheduled to commence later this year and is planned to be completed before the end of March 2010.

With regard to the road realignment scheme at Farmhill Road, Killyclogher, including the widening of Ballynamullan Bridge, the design work is included in the 2009/2010 Local Transport and Safety Measures (LTSM) programme for the Omagh District. Construction is expected to follow in 2010/2011, subject to the availability of funding.

In relation to the construction of a pedestrian footbridge in Beragh, this is also included on the 2009/2010 LTSM programme for the Omagh District. However, delivery of this scheme is dependant on the successful acquisition of the necessary lands and the availability of funding.

In relation to repairs to the Corkill Road from Seskinore to Clogher, a stretch of this road was inspected on 7 May 2009, and the defects recorded have since been repaired.

I am further advised that the section of the road, near the junction of Ravera Road, is currently being considered for resurfacing work later this year.

Streets Lights in Old Quay Road, Holywood

Dr S Farry asked the Minister for Regional Development why the streets lights in Old Quay Road, Holywood have been on 24-hours a day for the past three months, and what representations have been made to Northern Ireland Electricity to rectify the matter. (AQW 9004/09)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that its officials first reported a fault in the street lighting electricity supply cable network, which supplies the Old Quay Road area of Holywood to Northern Ireland Electricity (NIE), on 10 April 2009.

Pending permanent restoration works, NIE temporarily restored power to street lighting in the area on 5 May 2009. However, this left the street lights continuously on.

As a result of the Member's recent contact with Roads Service, officials again contacted NIE regarding the fault, and they have undertaken to repair the fault as soon as possible.

DEPARTMENT FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Social Security Inquiries

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQO 2700/09, to outline the procedure for passing inquiries relating to pensions, child maintenance, social security and other allowances from her constituency office to her Department. (AQW 8648/09)

Minister for Social Development (Ms M Ritchie): The procedure in place for passing such inquiries from my constituency office to the Department is a matter of simple logistics. Where a constituent raises such matters with me in a letter, I bring or send that letter to my Department. If the correspondence happens to be by email then the initial email is also forwarded to my Department. In either case the correspondence is dealt with by the Department in the same way as any other inquiry.

Warm Homes Scheme

Mr R Beggs asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the Warm Homes Scheme and to advise on the process for fresh applications and when successful applicants can expect to have home improvements carried out. (AQW 8671/09)

Minister for Social Development: The contracts for the new Warm Homes Scheme have just been awarded to the successful bidders: H&A Mechanical Services Ltd and Bryson Charitable Group. Those contracts specify a scheme start date of 1 July 2009. The two new Scheme Managers are keen to develop a joint marketing initiative. Once they have set up a single contact telephone number, I will officially launch the scheme in the local press. The Housing Executive anticipates that the new Scheme Managers will start processing applications before the end of July 2009.

Replacement Oil-Fired Central Heating

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development if she intends to give equal opportunity for new or replacement oil-fired central heating to people who apply and qualify from rural community and urban communities. (AQW 8715/09)

Minister for Social Development: The Warm Homes Scheme will target those household in receipt of a qualifying benefit who have no central heating, solid fuel, Economy 7 or LPG heating.

The Warm Homes Scheme will be application led and the Scheme Managers will undertake proactive marketing covering the whole of Northern Ireland. However, particular focus will be given to areas where need is greatest or where take-up relative to need is low. There is a commitment that at least 40% of households assisted should be located in rural areas where there often tends to be a higher concentration of Hard to Treat homes

Employment and Support Allowance

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development what is the average duration of phonecalls to her Department about Employment and Support Allowance. (AQW 8749/09)

Minister for Social Development: The latest information available on the average duration of a call to the Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) Centre is for the period 22 June to 26 June. During this period the Centre received a total of 5,858 calls and answered 5,594. The table below provides a breakdown of the average call time on the ESA claim line and the enquiry line:-

	All Calls	Calls to ESA Claim Line	Calls to ESA Enquiry Line
Calls Answered	5594	1050	4544
Average Inbound Call Duration*	00:06:16	00:09:34	00:05:30

* Call duration is reported in Hours:Minutes:Seconds

Employment and Support Allowance

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development how many applications have been registered for Employment and Support Allowance since its inception. (AQW 8750/09)

Minister for Social Development: The total number of claims to Employment and Support Allowance that have been received and registered between 27 October 2008 and 30 June 2009 is 21,457.

Employment and Support Allowance

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development how many phonecalls have been made to her Department regarding Employment and Support Allowance since its inception. (AQW 8751/09)

Minister for Social Development: The total number of telephone calls that have been made to the Employment and Support Allowance Centre between 27 October 2008 and 26 June 2009 is 167,441. Of these calls, 42,380 were made to the 0800 claim line and 125,061 were made to the 0845 enquiry line.

Home Improvement Grants

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister for Social Development how long, on average, it takes the Housing Executive to pay each of the home improvement grants it operates; and how this compares with the target set for payment. (AQW 8756/09)

Minister for Social Development: Currently on average, the length of time it takes the Housing Executive to make payments is as follows:-

- Renovation Grant in 5.4 weeks
- Replacement Grant in 5.2 weeks
- Disabled Facilities Grants in 5.3 weeks; and
- Home Repairs Assistance 5.2 weeks

The Housing Executive aims to make 90% of all grant payments within 6 weeks.

Housing Executive's Craigavon District

Mr J O'Dowd asked the Minister for Social Development how many Housing Executive rural cottage tenants in the Craigavon District have been affected by the Housing Executive's decision to delay an external maintenance scheme in the Craigavon district. (AQW 8759/09)

Minister for Social Development: The scheme in question is a Multi Element Improvement for 19 rural cottages within the Lurgan District office area at an estimated cost of £496k. The Housing Executive are currently unable to confirm when the works will commence. However, should finance become available the Housing Executive anticipates that it could deliver the scheme within the next financial year.

Housing Executive's Newtownards District

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister for Social Development to detail all improvement schemes currently planned for the Housing Executive's Ards District, and to indicate the cost and an anticipated commencement dates. (AQW 8808/09)

Minister for Social Development: The table below details the improvement and maintenance schemes programmed for the Housing Executive's Newtownards District 2009/10:-

Type	Scheme	Dwgs	Start Date	Estimated Cost (k)	Comment
Kitchens	Cypress Crescent/East St	34	Jul-09	153	
	Ballyhalbert etc	27	Sep-09	96	
	Bowtown	30		135	Reserve scheme*
Bathrooms	Scrabo	42		42	Reserve scheme*
Heating	Donaghadee	112		493	Reserve scheme*
External Cyclical Maintenance	Greyabbey/Kircubbin	171		320	Reserve scheme*

* The delivery of all reserve schemes is subject to the availability of finance

Housing Executive's Newtownards District

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister for Social Development to detail all improvement schemes currently under way in the Housing Executive's Ards District, and to indicate the cost and anticipated dates for conclusion. (AQW 8809/09)

Minister for Social Development: The table below details the improvement and maintenance schemes currently on site in the Housing Executive's Newtownards District:-

Type	Scheme	Dwellings	Start Date	Cost (£k)	Estimated completion
ECM*	Beechfield Dr. Donaghadee	222	30/04/2009	515	Feb-10
Kitchens	Scrabo	201	26/01/2009	894	Nov-09
Heating	Movilla 1	51	01/09/2008	259	Jul-09
	Movilla 2	88	26/01/2009	436	Jul-09
MEI**	Westwinds Ph 3	54	31/03/2008	1,626	Mar-10
	Main St / Islandview Gardens	5	31/03/2008	210	Sep-09

* ECM – External Cyclical Maintenance

** MEI – Multi Element improvement Scheme

Childcare Organisations

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister for Social Development to detail funding provided by her Department to (i) pre-school childcare organisations; and (ii) school age childcare organisations, in each of the last five years. (AQW 8832/09)

Minister for Social Development: Details of the funding provided by my Department, to support pre-school and school age childcare services in each of the last five financial years, is detailed in the table below.

In 2008 I intervened to save childcare services that were at risk of closure. In February 2009 I extended that funding for a further year to protect childcare services while the Ministerial Sub-Committee on Children and Young People works to bring coherence to childcare provision. The current funding situation is untenable at a time that my Department is facing acute financial pressures.

Department for Social Development Funding for Childcare Services 2004/05 – 2008/09 ¹					
	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
(i) Pre-School	£164,739	£1,027,953	£709,187	£1,336,007	£1,287,945
(ii) School Age	£21,502	£177,089	£225,778	£247,346	£216,134
Both ²	£30,151	£171,707	£272,187	£306,116	£314,488
Total	£216,392	£1,376,749	£1,207,152	£1,889,469	£1,818,567

Notes:

1 From 2006/07 includes funding under the Children and Young People Fund 2006/07 – 2007/08 and the Women's Centres Childcare Fund 2008/09.

2 Funding identified as supporting services to children within both age ranges.

School-Age Childcare Organisations

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister for Social Development if her Department has a lead agency for liaising with and supporting school-age childcare organisations; and, if so, does this agency utilise cross-departmental links in its work with this sector. (AQW 8834/09)

Minister for Social Development: My Department does not have a lead agency for liaising with and supporting school-age childcare organisations.

Employment Support Allowance

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) by grade, the number of staff employed in the Social Security Agency to work on Employment Support Allowance (ESA); (ii) the number of vacancies, by grade; (iii) the full complement of staff, by grade; (iv) what action is being taken to fill the vacancies; and (v) will any staff be recruited to work on ESA in the next six months. (AQW 8835/09)

Minister for Social Development: (i),(ii),(iii): The table below sets out the number of staff currently employed in the Employment Support Allowance Centre. It also provides details of the full staff complement by grade, the current number of staff and the variance. (Surplus or vacancy)

Grade	Staff Complement *	Staff Employed*	Variance*
Grade 6	1	1	0.00
Grade 7	1	1	0.00
DP	2	2	0.00
SO	6	5	-1.00
EO1	11	10	-1.00
SSO1	74.15	69.35	- 4.80
SSO2	129.3	134.12	4.82
AA	20.7	22	1.30
Total	245.15	244.47	-0.68

* The Figures shown in the table above are Full-Time Equivalent.

In addition to the staff in post detailed in the table the Centre is supported by a team of Experts Users, 9 SSO1s and 2 EO1s, who assist staff with the complexities of the new benefit rules and the systems.

(iv), (v): The Agency gives a high priority to resourcing the ESA Centre and takes ongoing action to fill vacancies in line with the workforce plans. The workloads in the ESA Centre will be closely monitored for the remainder of the year, and staffing levels will be increased as necessary to meet business needs.

Civil Servants

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister for Social Development how many senior Civil Servants who oversaw the setting up of the Employment and Support Allowance centre were awarded bonuses last year; and on what grounds. (AQW 8851/09)

Minister for Social Development: It is our policy, taking account of the Data Protection Act, not to disclose the remuneration details of individual civil servants, other than in broad terms. Information on the total amount paid in non-consolidated bonus payments to Senior Civil Servants in the Department for Social Development in respect of performance year 2008/2009 is not yet available.

Social Housing

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development to outline (i) the advice she has given to developers and agents who have over 1000 social houses in the pipeline, in light of the new EU procurement policy; and (ii) how she intends to address the current shortage of social housing. (AQW 8906/09)

Minister for Social Development: During week commencing 25 May, Public Notices were placed across the press outlining the position in respect of what are known as 'Design and Build' package deals. Developing

European Union Case Law brought into question the legality of such deals and subsequent legal advice confirmed that these package deals did not meet EU Procurement Law.

The Northern Ireland Housing Executive has been able to replace the 'Design and Build' package deals previously included in the Social Housing Development Programme with alternative new build schemes procured by traditional competitive arrangements.

This will help ensure that the targeted social newbuild starts of 1750 units, is achieved. Prospective Design and Build contractors will be free to compete for all of this work. They also have the option of selling development land to Housing Associations at any time.

The Northern Ireland Housing Executive have produced a procurement compliant program for 2009/10 and it is available at: www.nihe.gov.uk/index/wwu_home/development_programme_group.htm.

Social Housing Maintenance

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister for Social Development how much has been spent on social housing maintenance in each of the last two years. (AQW 8952/09)

Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive's maintenance expenditure for the period requested is detailed below:

Year	2007/08	2008/09
£	106,746,757	113,993,662

Business Improvement Districts

Mr D O'Loan asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the progress of creating legislation to set up Business Improvement Districts. (AQW 8963/09)

Minister for Social Development: I met with Ministerial colleagues and officials from DFP and DOE on 2 July 2009 to discuss Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) and associated legislation required to implement them fully. It was agreed that my officials will work with their counterparts in DOE and DFP to determine the feasibility of introducing BIDs in Northern Ireland. Once this process has been completed, I will consider the results with my Ministerial colleagues.

Employment Support Allowance

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Social Development how many applications have been made for Employment and Support Allowance in the North Down Constituency since the inception of the allowance, and how many of these applications have been turned down. (AQW 8987/09)

Minister for Social Development: Information on the number of applications to Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) is not available by parliamentary constituency. The table below provides details of the number of fresh claims received in Northern Ireland each month since the benefit was introduced on 27 October 2008.

Month	Number of claims
October	56
November	940
December	1729
January	2435
February	2993
March	3313
April	2894

Month	Number of claims
May	3267
June	3830
Total	21,457

Information on the number of applications turned down is not available. The vast majority of claims to ESA are accepted where a customer provides the correct information and supplies current medical evidence. Consistent with the policy, entitlement to ESA continues until their claim is examined by a medical professional and a decision on their limited capability for work is made.

Small Pockets of Deprivation Programme

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Social Development if she intends to continue Small Pockets of Deprivation programme funding for the next two years. (AQW 8994/09)

Minister for Social Development: The Small Pockets of Deprivation funding will continue until 31 March 2010. An evaluation of the funding up to 31 March 2009 is being finalised. I will make a decision on the future of this programme before the end of this year. It is expected that the Local Community Fund will close at the end of this financial year.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY COMMISSION

9-11 Church Street, Ballymena

Mr J Dallat asked the Assembly Commission what information it holds on a reported £25,000 sub-letting plan for the first floor of the Assembly-funded constituency office at 9-11 Church Street, Ballymena. (AQW 8764/09)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Rev Dr R Coulter): The Assembly Commission holds a current lease agreement for the premises at 9-11 Church Street, Ballymena but holds no information on any sub-letting plan.

Revised Written Answers

Friday 10 July 2009

(AQW 7907/09)

(i) The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister has issued 14 credit cards (Government Procurement Cards) to officials for work purposes.

(ii) (a) and (b) There have been 7 punitive bank charges incurred on these cards over the last five years amounting to £1,803.75.

(ii) (c) These charges were as a result of the late payment of bills during the immediate transition to a new accounting system for the Department in 2007-08. These initial processing issues have now been resolved. In addition, all monthly balances on these cards are now paid by direct debit to ensure that late payment charges are not incurred. (AQO 2244/09)

My Department's Roads Service does not have a statutory duty regarding the condition of roadside trees. However, Roads Service does have a statutory duty to maintain the public road network, which includes ensuring that boundary trees or hedges do not overgrow the roadway and footway, thereby impeding road users and pedestrians.

The statutory obligation requires that Roads Service initially advise the adjacent land owner, responsible for the overgrowing hedge, requesting that the necessary remedial work to remove or cut the trees or hedges is carried out in the interests of public safety. This is normally undertaken by the issue of an informal letter which generally resolves the majority of the problems identified. If that fails, Roads Service has powers, under Article 50 of the Roads (Northern Ireland) Order 1993, to serve a notice on the land owner requiring that the tree or hedge is removed or cut back, so as to remove the danger or obstruction. Where the requirements of the notice are not complied with, Roads Service may carry out the necessary works and recover the costs from the land owner.

REVISED WRITTEN ANSWERS

Friday 10 July 2009

(AQW 7907/09)

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(AQO 2244/09)

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WRITTEN ANSWERS

Department for Regional Development		Childcare Organisations	306
Ards Peninsula Road Maintenance	290	Civil Servants	307
Ballymena to Coleraine Railway Track	290	Employment and Support Allowance	304
Belfast Rapid Transport System	285	Employment and Support Allowance	304
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