

Government Progress Report

Progress Report on the

Implementation of An Agreed Programme
for Government

between Fianna Fáil

and

the Progressive Democrats.

August 2004

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	I	HOUSING	48
WORKING FOR PEACE	1	AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT	52
BUILDING PEACE AND JUSTICE	1	Rural Development	56
IRELAND AND EUROPE	3	PROMOTING TOURISM	58
IRELAND AND THE WORLD	7	MARINE AND NATURAL RESOURCES	60
DEFENCE	8	BUILDING AN INCLUSIVE SOCIETY	63
SUSTAINING A STRONG ECONOMY	10	HEALTH	67
BUDGETARY AND ECONOMIC POLICY	10	EDUCATION	76
Public Expenditure	11	CRIME	83
Taxation	11	OLDER PEOPLE	88
Delivering Major Capital Programmes	12	PENSIONS	88
EMPLOYMENT AND ENTERPRISE	13	CHILDREN AND CHILDCARE	89
Improving the conditions of employment	18	DISABILITY AND CARING	94
RESEARCH, DEVELOPMENT AND INNOVATION	19	SUPPORTING DIVERSITY AND TOLERANCE	97
INSURANCE AND ROAD SAFETY	24	ASYLUM AND IMMIGRATION	98
DEVELOPING THE REGIONS & THE ISLANDS	27	EQUALITY AND LAW REFORM	101
Islands	30	TACKLING DRUG ABUSE	103
AN INTEGRATED TRANSPORT POLICY	31	REGENERATING DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES	105
Integrated Transport	31	SUPPORTING CIVIC LIFE	107
Railways	33	GOOD GOVERNMENT	107
Roads	35	Integrity in Public Life	107
Cycle Network and Facilities	35	Delivering Value for Money	108
Rural Transport	36	e-Government	108
Traffic Corps	37	Proven Partnership	109
Taxis	37	Semi-State Sector	109
Aviation	38	Dáil and Local Government Reform	111
THE ENVIRONMENT	39	Electoral Participation	112
Air Quality	39	BETTER FACILITIES FOR SPORT AND RECREATION	112
Water Quality	40	CULTURE AND HERITAGE	114
Waste	42	THE IRISH LANGUAGE AND THE GAELTACHT	117
Litter	45	LEGISLATION	121
Climate Change	45	Bills Enacted (6 June 2002- 19 July 2004)	
Funding/Eco Taxes	46		
Enforcement	47		
Partnership	47		
Nuclear Safety	48		

INTRODUCTION

This is the second annual report of the Government's progress towards implementation of the Programme for Government. It is the seventh successive report since Fianna Fáil and the Progressive Democrats agreed their first programme for Government in 1997. The purpose of this report is to state factually the position in relation to each commitment given in our Programme at the end of this, the second of the five years of our mandate from the people.

The past year has been one of achievement abroad and consolidation at home. Ireland's successful Presidency of the European Union has been the result of long and careful preparation. On 1st May Ireland welcomed the ten applicant states into full membership of the EU. This was a historic rejoining of the European family of nations after two world wars and decades of cold war.

Ireland's Presidency successfully met the challenge of international events and achieved agreement on a new draft constitution for an enlarged European Union of twenty five states. This constitution, while fully respecting the sovereignty of every state, will ensure that the union of all twenty five together will be effective and accountable for the future.

Achieving lasting peace in Northern Ireland continues to be a central focus for the Government. While continuing challenges remain, these will be met with commitment and resolve. The Government is actively working with the British Government and the party's in Northern Ireland to secure the full implementation of the Good Friday Agreement.

Ireland has one of the most open, trading economies in the world. We have successfully come through a real global economic slowdown maintaining high levels of employment and high levels of public investment.

Our people and our labour market have been flexible and adaptable. We have increased the minimum wage and it has not cost jobs. We have seen continued immigration, not renewed emigration.

We have reduced corporation tax, without an erosion of the tax base. Business confidence is up. New jobs are being created. Investment is increasing. And tax revenues are healthy.

The strategic management of the economy, including practical and effective regulatory reform, working through social partnership, is the sound basis for Ireland's future.

Lower taxes have created the stronger economy that keeps more people at work and that yields more revenue for investment in public services and social inclusion.

We have made real progress on specific issues in the Programme for Government in the last year: LUAS, broadband, roads, insurance costs, old age pensions, capital investment in our schools and regeneration in areas such as Ballymun and responding to patients' needs with the National Treatment Purchase Fund are some examples.

Our work over the past twelve months builds on what has been achieved during the previous six years. Hundreds of thousands of people have been lifted out of poverty, hundreds of thousands of jobs have been created and hundreds of millions have been invested in housing, in education, in health and in our most deprived communities.

These changes and the prospect of more progress, are the fruits of policies that are working.

Now for the future the Government renews its commitment to fulfilling its mandate and to delivering on its commitments. While many public services are much better today than when we took responsibility for them, we know too that there are others that must continue to be improved.

Our commitment as a Government is to continue to successfully manage our economy so as to deliver the results and the resources for sustained social and economic progress, as set out in our agreed Programme for Government.

Bertie Ahern, TD,
Taoiseach

Mary Harney, TD,
Tánaiste

WORKING FOR PEACE

BUILDING PEACE AND JUSTICE

Over the next five years, our overriding priority will be to secure lasting peace in Ireland through the full implementation of the Good Friday Agreement, the consolidation of its institutions, and the development of a spirit of friendship and cooperation between North and South. This we will do without prejudice to the ultimate goal of achieving a united Ireland in peace and agreement.

- The immediate priority of the Government is to secure a political basis for the stable operation of the devolved institutions in Northern Ireland. This requires clear commitments by those concerned to the definitive ending of the culture of paramilitarism and to participation, on an inclusive basis, in the Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive.
- The Government will pursue this objective through ongoing and intensive contacts with the British Government and the Northern Ireland parties, including through the framework of the current Review of the operation of the Good Friday Agreement.
- The Joint Declaration and associated documents published by the Governments on 1 May 2003 sets out the acts of completion necessary to restore trust and confidence, implement the Agreement fully, restore devolved government and attain a fully normal society in Northern Ireland. The Joint Declaration continues to represent a shared agenda of both Governments for the ongoing implementation of the Agreement, particularly in the areas of criminal justice, policing, human rights and equality.

We will work to consolidate the success of the North-South Ministerial Council, and of the Implementation Bodies. Also cooperate with the British Government in the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference and bilaterally, on non-devolved matters.

- Prior to the suspension of the Northern Ireland Assembly, the North/South Ministerial Council had met a total of sixty-five times. The Council will meet again on the restoration of devolved government in Northern Ireland.
- The agreed work programme of the Council is being taken forward at official level, and the Implementation Bodies continue to operate throughout suspension on a care and maintenance basis.
- Seven meetings of the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference have taken place since October 2002.

Within the framework of the British-Irish Council, seek to develop strong bilateral relations with Scotland and Wales, as well as with the UK as a whole.

- The British-Irish Council is proving a valuable forum for consultation, discussion and the exchange of information among its membership, and there have been five summit meetings since the inaugural meeting in London in December 1999, including Dublin (2001), Jersey (2002), Scotland (2002) and Wales (2003).
- Work is continuing in eight priority areas of work, including drugs, in which Ireland takes the lead within the Council.

We will pursue an active policy of reconciliation between differing traditions.

- Groups involved in reconciliation work are also supported, both directly, through the Reconciliation Fund (administered by the Department of Foreign Affairs) and indirectly through the wider EU PEACE II and programmes operated by the International Fund for Ireland.
- Development of the historic Battle of the Boyne site and support for the work at Messines continues.

We will work for the formation of the North-South Parliamentary Body envisaged in the Good Friday Agreement.

- Recognising that this is primarily a matter for the Oireachtas and the Northern Ireland Assembly, the Government and the Northern Ireland Administration, working together in the North/South Ministerial Council, have discussed the establishment of a North/South Parliamentary Forum.
- Further progress on this issue is dependent on the restoration of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

We will put in place an All-Ireland travel scheme for pensioners resident in all parts of this island.

- This is under review as part of North/South dialogue. Implementation of this scheme will require detailed discussions and agreements with the relevant authorities and transport providers on both sides of the border.

We will support the principle of full public enquiries into the murders of Pat Finucane, Robert Hamill and Rosemary Nelson, and use our good offices to advance the establishment of the truth.

- There are ongoing contacts and meetings between government officials and the families, and with the relevant NGOs, on these cases.
- The Taoiseach met with the Finucane family on 13 February 2003 and reiterated the Government's call for a public inquiry.
- The Government formally set out its support for this case at the United Nations Human Rights Commission in April 2004.

We will act upon the recommendations of the Barron Enquiry into the Dublin and Monaghan bombings and continue to work to ensure that all persons and agencies, both here and abroad, cooperate fully with the enquiry.

- The Joint Oireachtas Committee on Justice, Equality, Defence and Women's Rights has carried out a comprehensive consideration of the Barron Report into the Dublin and Monaghan bombings of 1974.
- The Committee made a number of recommendations in relation to matters pertaining to this jurisdiction and to Northern Ireland and Britain.
- These will be taken forward following consideration of the Committee's report by the Oireachtas and the Government.

We will work to ensure that the right to freedom from sectarian harassment set out in the Agreement becomes a reality.

- In contacts with the British Government, we have pressed for greater protection for vulnerable/interface communities affected by sectarian violence, including by improved police action.
- We have also encouraged community-based efforts to alleviate interface tensions.
- This issue has also been addressed in the Joint Declaration published on 1st May 2003.

In so far as it lies within our power, we will strive to create and maintain a secure environment for political progress and bring about, both through the application of law and by persuasion, a complete and lasting cessation of all paramilitary activity in Northern Ireland and throughout these islands, including punishment beatings and shootings, and the transformation of movements linked to paramilitary organisations into exclusively democratic organisations and completion of the process of putting arms beyond use.

- These issues are being taken forward in the context of the Joint Declaration and discussions taking place between the two Governments and pro-Agreement parties.

We will encourage maximum cooperation between police forces North and South.

- The Intergovernmental Agreement on the implementation of the Patten Recommendations on co-operation between the Garda Síochána and the Police Service of Northern Ireland came into force in November 2002.
- The Garda Síochána (Police Co-operation) Act, 2003, gives effect to Articles 1 and 2 of the above Agreement.

We will improve North-South infrastructural links and facilitate cross-border planning.

- We are working to improve cross-border and all-island infrastructural links and strategic planning across a range of areas, including through the North/South Ministerial Council and the Implementation Bodies, and, bilaterally, in areas such as Energy and Communications.
- The all-island dimension is an essential element of all new policy development and accordingly each Government Department has a dedicated North/South Unit.
- Progress on the creation of an All-Island Energy Market is now a priority both North and South. In June we launched a draft All-Island Energy Market Development Framework which charts the way forward for the creation of an all-island energy market and sets out strategic objectives and key priorities to be achieved over the next 3 years.
- We have issued a Policy Direction to the Commission for Communications Regulation on the issue of Cross-Border Roaming Charges on mobile phone networks.

IRELAND AND EUROPE

Based on the mandate conferred on both parties in the general Election, submit the Nice Treaty on enlargement to the people in a referendum to be held later this year in a way which seeks to address the concerns of the people as expressed during previous referendums and in the National Forum on Europe.

- In June 2002, the Government, through the Seville Declarations, secured confirmation by the European Council that the Treaty of Nice in no way affected Ireland's traditional policy of military neutrality.

- Following passage by the Oireachtas of the 26th amendment to the Constitution Bill, which was designed to authorise ratification of the Treaty of Nice and to prohibit the State from entering into a common defence without the approval of the Irish people, the necessary amendment to the Constitution was approved by referendum on 19 October 2002.
- All formalities connected with ratification were completed in order to allow ratification in December 2002, in line with the objective set out above.

An intergovernmental conference to agree any future changes to the Treaties will only take place in a few years time, probably in 2004, well after the expected conclusion of at least the first wave of enlargement negotiations.

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We will play a full part in the European Convention and the Europe-wide debate on the future shape of the European Union.

- Through its representatives at the Convention, and in discussion with other Governments both bilaterally and at meetings of the European Council and the Council of Ministers, the Government played an active and constructive role to shape an outcome which both protects specific Irish concerns and promotes the renewal and reform of the European Union.
- In particular, Ireland worked with other Member States to ensure that the principles of institutional balance and equality between Member States were respected in the Convention's Report.
- The Convention concluded in July 2003, achieving a broad consensus on a draft Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe. The Intergovernmental Conference began its work under the Italian Presidency in October 2003, but did not succeed in reaching agreement in December 2003. It therefore fell to Ireland to chair the negotiations during its Presidency.
- The negotiations were brought to a successful conclusion on 18 June with agreement on a European Constitution. A fully satisfactory outcome was achieved on all of the key issues of concern identified by the Government before the negotiations began (tax, justice, defence and equality in the Commission).
- The European Constitution will be signed in Rome on 29 October. To enter into force, it must be ratified by all Member States, according to their constitutional requirements. It is agreed that this should take place within 2 years.

We believe that the broad institutional balance, as it currently exists, serves the Union well. We will oppose efforts to have existing integration supplanted by purely intergovernmental cooperation, or important common policies, such as the Common Agricultural Policy or regional and social policy, extensively renationalised.

- We helped to ensure that the institutional provisions of the draft Constitutional Treaty fully reflected the need to maintain a broad institutional balance.
- In the final negotiations on enlargement which took place at the European Council meetings in October and December, 2002, Ireland fully supported the accession of ten new Member States.
- We also helped ensure that the financing arrangements for enlargement provided safeguards for the funding of the EU including the Common Agricultural Policy up to 2013.
- Ireland, as Presidency, prepared an analytical report for the June European Council on the deliberations at Ministerial and official level on the next funding round to 2013. The report will inform further work on this issue. Ireland will seek a fair and equitable outcome, which is good for Europe and good for Ireland, from the next phase of negotiations which will begin once the Commission has tabled legislative proposals on this issue.

We believe that commitment to the EU and its development in no way implies support for a European superstate or for an ambitious federalist project which is detached from public opinion.

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In addition, we believe that fiscal policy should remain the preserve of national administrations.

- We are very much in the mainstream in seeking an EU where sovereignty is pooled where appropriate to tackle common challenges, while preserving the primary role of the Member States as the cornerstone of a democratic Europe.
- On fiscal policy, along with like-minded countries, we successfully pressed the case at the IGC for the preservation of unanimity in the decision making process at EU level in relation to fiscal matters.

We believe Ireland's best interests lie in assisting and working with the applicant countries. Within the next twelve months, we will publish a specific programme to ensure the expansion of social, cultural and economic cooperation with all countries that are joining the European Union.

- As a result of the close relations with the new Member States developed by the Government, the accession of the new Member States on 1 May, during Ireland's Presidency of the European Union, was successfully achieved and will provide a sound basis to ensure fruitful cooperation with these countries in future years of shared EU membership.
- During Ireland's Presidency we succeeded in closing all technical negotiations in respect of Bulgaria's application for membership.
- We have also put in place a programme of €1.27 million per annum specifically dedicated to assisting with the training and development needs of the new member states.
- We now have Embassies in seven of the new member states – Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia

We will take part in peace support and humanitarian operations (Petersberg tasks) in missions that are endorsed by the UN. We will work directly with the UN as well as with our EU partners under a UN mandate, to protect human rights and to prevent ethnic conflict and humanitarian disasters. We will work to ensure that the European Security and Defence Policy continues to develop in the service of peace.

- Throughout our EU Presidency, we facilitated further development of the EU's ability to engage, as a force for peace, in peace-keeping and crisis management missions, particularly in support of the United Nations.
- During summer 2003, Ireland contributed to an EU military operation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) undertaken at the request of the UN. Members of An Garda Síochána continue to participate in the European Union Police Mission in Bosnia-Herzegovina headed by an Assistant Garda Commissioner.
- The Irish Presidency brought forward work on an anticipated EU military operation in Bosnia-Herzegovina which is to occur with full UN approval. A further EU police assistance mission in the DRC is also under consideration.
- Considerable progress was achieved during the Irish Presidency in carrying forward the development of the European Security and Defence Policy as an effective tool for conflict prevention and crisis management. Of particular note was the progress achieved in consultation

with the United Nations on modalities by which the EU can provide military capabilities in support of the UN.

We will implement Dáil reforms to ensure improved scrutiny of EU legislation and developments.

- Enhanced provisions for the scrutiny by the Oireachtas of EU legislation were introduced on 1 July 2002 and confirmed in the EU (Scrutiny) Act 2002. Since then, Government Departments have submitted more than 600 proposals to the Oireachtas for review.
- Ministers have also appeared frequently before the European Affairs Committee and a number of sectoral Committees to brief them on Council meetings and developments at EU level.
- Under the terms of the EU (Scrutiny) Act 2002, Ministers also submit six-monthly reports on developments in the EU to the Oireachtas.
- The Government will continue to work to ensure that scrutiny arrangements offer members of the Oireachtas the opportunity to express their views on draft EU laws and policies.

We will run a proactive and efficient EU Presidency in 2004.

- Ireland's EU Presidency which concluded on 30 June 2004 achieved significant progress across the range of the Union's policy areas and the priority areas which we had identified in the Presidency programme.
- Improved work methods agreed by the Government at its meeting on 16 December 2003 were introduced resulting in more focussed agendas, more effective preparation and more efficient conduct of meetings.
- A successful meeting of the European Council in Brussels on 24/25 March resulted in important decisions on the IGC, terrorism and the Lisbon Agenda and set the stage for further progress, especially on the IGC, in the final stages of the Presidency.
- At the IGC and European Council on 17/18 June 2004 agreement was reached on the European Constitution and decisions were taken in other policy areas including with regard to the area of freedom, justice and security, the fight against terrorism, enlargement, the financial perspectives for 2007-2013 as well as in the external relations, Common Foreign and Security Policy and the European Security and Defence policy areas.
- A further meeting of the European Council on 29 June reached agreement on the nomination of the next President of the Commission as well as other senior appointments.
- Relations with the European Parliament have been excellent, with many Ministerial appearances. Significant progress was also made in the legislative area.
- In the external relations field, a key strategic theme of Ireland's Presidency was support for a more effective multilateral system. We promoted this theme through enhancing practical and effective cooperation between the EU and the UN and by including it as a key theme in the EU's dialogue with other regions. A joint declaration on effective multilateralism was agreed with the African Union and our ASEM partners during the Irish Presidency.
- Africa and the Middle East were also high on the external relations agenda. With the help of the EU, an African Peace Facility has been established which will assist in strengthening African peace-keeping and conflict prevention capabilities.
- In relation to the Middle East, EU Foreign Ministers issued a statement at their informal meeting in mid – April which reiterated the EU's commitment to the Quartet Road Map and a negotiated two-state solution. Ireland represented the EU Presidency at the subsequent Quartet meeting in

New York. In addition, we worked to develop a Strategic Partnership with the Mediterranean and the Middle East which aims to promote the development, through partnership, of a common zone of peace, prosperity and progress in the region.

- As EU Presidency, we represented the European Union at productive and successful summit meetings with Canada, China, Japan, the Latin American and Caribbean States, Russia and the United States and at many other meetings with third countries and regional groups. We will seek to develop our bilateral relations with those countries with which we developed close working relations during our EU Presidency. Particular emphasis will be given to promoting trade and people to people relations.
- The momentum generated since 1st January and the huge effort put into the task helped ensure a hugely successful EU Presidency which has ensured that the reputation of the country has been greatly enhanced worldwide.
- We also worked to ensure that costs were minimised and economies of scale availed of by centralising arrangements for a number of Presidency related logistics issues, such as infrastructures, transport, merchandising, stationery, gifts and security accreditations.

IRELAND AND THE WORLD

We believe Ireland must continue to play an active role on promoting development, human rights and democracy in the world.

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In the pursuance of our foreign policy objectives, we remain committed to the primacy of the UN's role in promoting constructive international relations.

- The Government remains committed to the primacy of the UN in promoting constructive international relations
- Ireland has made effective multilateralism - the task of strengthening the capacity of, and confidence in, the United Nations - a priority of its EU Presidency. This was a key aspect of the EU's dialogue with key regional partners during the Presidency such as with the African Union, the Latin America and Caribbean partners and ASEM.
- Ireland joined with its EU partners in making a joint EU submission to Secretary-General Annan's High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, which was established in December 2003 to analyse current and future threats to peace and security, and assess how best collective action could meet these threats.

We will promote our strategic political and economic interests and contribute to other nations by expanding our resident diplomatic missions in particular with EU applicant countries and in Asia and Latin America.

- The issue of our diplomatic representation in the remaining EU Member and Applicant States as well as in the Middle East, Asia and Latin America is currently under active review.
- Secondary accreditations are an important and cost effective way of making contacts and promoting Ireland in countries where we do not have a resident Embassy. We are continuing to expand our network of non-resident accreditations, particularly in Africa and in Asia. Recently, Ambassadors have been accredited to East Timor, Angola, Liberia, Sierra Leone, the People's Democratic Republic of Korea, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Myanmar on a non-resident basis.

We will complete our major expansion of our overseas development aid programme, achieving the UN target of 0.7% of GNP by 2007.

- The Government intends to achieve the UN target by 2007. As resources increase, the depth and reach of the Government's development cooperation work are steadily expanding.
- Despite the many pressures on the public finances, the Development Cooperation Ireland budget increased from €374m in 2003 to €399m in 2004. With ODA expenditure by other Departments expected to reach some €80m, total spending on ODA is likely to approach €480m in 2004, the highest level ever in the history of the programme.
- The percentage level achieved in 2003 (0.41% of GNP) is likely to be maintained, or possibly exceeded this year. Ireland is currently the seventh largest donor in the world in percentage terms well ahead of the EU average.

The aid programme will be developed along the lines of the Ireland Aid Review Report with the principal aim being to contribute to the reduction of global poverty, inequality and exclusion.

- Substantial progress has been made in giving effect to the recommendations made by the Ireland Aid Review report of 2002. These recommendations, which were endorsed by the Government, are being systematically implemented.
- The reduction of global poverty, inequality and exclusion are the paramount objectives of the Development Cooperation Ireland programme. In 2003 the programme was warmly praised by the OECD's Development Assistance Committee for its very strong poverty focus. The DAC, the international arbiter of standards in development cooperation, complimented Ireland on the quality and impact of its programme and the effective use being made of the expanding resources.

Particular initiatives will be taken both in the aid programme and at the highest political level to fight the HIV/AIDS crisis which is ravaging many poorer countries, especially in Africa.

- Fulfilling a commitment by the Taoiseach, over €40 million is being spent annually at present on a wide range of activities related to the prevention, treatment and mitigation of HIV/AIDS. These funds are being channelled through multilateral organisations, governments in programme countries and NGOs.
- Development Cooperation Ireland contributed €10 million in 2003 and 2004 to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria bringing to €30 million our total contribution to date.
- We are also working with the Clinton Foundation and the Government of Mozambique on the preparation and implementation of integrated HIV and AIDS treatment, care and prevention programmes in Mozambique.
- HIV/AIDS was a key issue for Ireland's EU Presidency. Initiatives in this area included a major Dublin conference held in February to highlight the HIV/AIDS crisis in Europe and Central Asia. There has also been a meeting of European and African parliamentarians on the pandemic in Africa.

DEFENCE

We believe that maintaining a defence capacity related to security needs is an important expression of national sovereignty.

We will follow through the implementation of the 2000 Defence White Paper, designed to equip our Defence Forces to meet peacetime challenges at home and abroad and to develop our Defence Forces.

- The White Paper runs to 2010 with extensive progress on roll out across all areas.
- The extensive modernisation programme continues, major projects this year include: 25 additional armoured personnel carriers; 8 trainer aircraft; Lear jet for Ministerial Air Transport. A procurement competition for light utility helicopters is in train.
- Considerable progress is being made on organisational aspects of the White Paper involving Air Corps, Naval Service, Army and Reserve.

We will maintain a full complement of 10,500 in the Permanent Defence Force, with the option of an extra 250 recruits at any one time.

- The average number for 2004 stands at 10,500. All Defence Forces commitments at home and overseas are being met.

A new career development plan, involving the continuation of a policy of regular recruitment will be implemented.

- The new career development plan will form part of the Integrated Personnel Management System.
- Regular recruitment continues, 436 enlisted in 2003, with 154 currently in training.

The new Integrated Personnel Management System will be introduced.

- Key elements are now part of the Action Plan agreed with the Permanent Defence Force representative associations under *Sustaining Progress*.

100% of revenue from property sales will be invested in infrastructure and equipment.

- All revenue from property sales reinvested in infrastructure and equipment expected to be in the region of €100 million.
- Five of the six barracks identified for closure have been sold. Murphy Barracks, Ballincollig realised in excess of €42 million in 2003, while the sale of Clancy Barracks was completed recently for €25.4 million.
- Magee Barracks, Kildare, lands at Gormanston, Co. Meath, sites at St. Bricin's Hospital, Dublin and part of Camp Field, Collins Barracks Cork, are earmarked for the Government's Affordable Housing Initiative.

Civil Defence will be managed by a Civil Defence Board underpinned by a modern legislative framework.

- The Civil Defence Board is in place.
- Decentralisation to Roscrea, Co. Tipperary expected to be completed in 2004.

Irish troops will continue to be available to serve abroad on international peacekeeping missions.

- Major deployments in Liberia (430) and Kosovo (260).
- Approximately 800 Defence Forces personnel currently serving overseas on UN missions, the largest commitment since withdrawal from Lebanon.

The Office of Emergency Planning will take the lead role in planning to meet threats from international terrorism and will work with all Government Departments and agencies who have planning responsibilities.

- The Government Task Force on Emergency Planning, under the chairmanship of the Minister for Defence, and the associated Interdepartmental Working Group continue to meet to address emergency planning issues.
- This work promotes co-ordinated emergency planning and responses to possible emergencies by public authorities charged with such responsibilities.
- The Office of Emergency Planning continues working with Government Departments and other public authorities overseeing emergency planning arrangements, to improve them through review and revision to ensure compatibility between different planning requirements and to ensure the best possible use of resources.

SUSTAINING A STRONG ECONOMY

BUDGETARY AND ECONOMIC POLICY

Fianna Fáil and the Progressive Democrats are committed to sustaining economic growth and maintaining full employment in the Irish economy. We see low inflation and responsible and effective fiscal policies as central to this.

We will keep the public finances in a healthy condition and we will keep down personal and business taxes in order to strengthen and maintain the competitive position of the Irish economy.

- Almost 669,000 income earners are now out of the tax net compared to 380,000 in 1997 (35 per cent of income earners compared to 25 per cent).
- No one on PAYE pays tax at less than €246 per week as opposed to €8 per week in 1997/98.
- Those aged 65 and over don't pay tax until they reach €15,500 per annum (single) or €31,000 per annum (married), more than double the level in 1997.
- Since 2000 we have had the lowest tax wedge in the EU 15 for the average single worker (per OECD)
- Business tax rates have been reduced, creating jobs and growth without sacrificing tax revenue in many cases.
- Sound fiscal policies have provided us with sound public finances while cutting taxes and increasing expenditure.
- Inflation, as measured by the Consumer Price Index, has fallen from 4.6% in 2002 to 2.3% in June this year.

Within these constraints we will concentrate the resources available to us on improving the quality of public services and delivering further real improvements to pensioners and people on low income

- Increases in public expenditure were focused on areas of health, social welfare and education as well as areas of physical infrastructure. Health expenditure increased to €10bn (+8%), social welfare expenditure, including Fund expenditure, to €1.3bn (+8%) and education spending to €6.6bn (+12%) in 2004.

- Capital Envelopes totalling €3.6 billion for the period 2004-2008 were introduced in Budget 2004. The Capital Envelopes include a commitment to keep the level of Exchequer funded capital investment at 5 per cent of GNP over the period. The envelopes will allow for an even flow of investment projects, facilitate better value for money and provide greater certainty in tackling the infrastructure deficit. The total capital envelope for roads and public transport projects is €9.4 billion.

Public Expenditure

The EU Stability and Growth Pact provides the overriding framework for our budgetary policy. Under the pact Ireland has given a commitment to keep the finances of general government close to balance or in surplus and to take corrective action when there is an actual or expected divergence from this objective. Fianna Fáil and the Progressive Democrats will respect this commitment.

- We remain well within our SGP commitments while expanding public services, keeping the tax burden low and reducing our debt/GDP ratio.

Taxation

Fianna Fail and the Progressive Democrats have delivered dramatic reductions in taxations over the last five years. The policy has helped to generate unprecedented growth in the Irish economy, a spectacular increase in the number of people at work and the effective elimination of long-term unemployment.

The parties remain committed to the achievement of the taxation objectives set out in the Action Programme for the Millennium. Over the next five years our priorities with regard to personal taxation will be :

to achieve a position where all those on the national minimum wage are removed from the tax net.

- The minimum wage, introduced by this Government has been increased to €7.00 per hour. At the same time, 90 per cent of it remains outside the tax net. We are targeting 100 per cent exclusion as resources allow.

to ensure that 80% of all earners pay tax only at standard rate.

- We did a lot to widen income tax bands in our first term. Renewed focus will be placed on this in framing future tax policy.
- Since 1997, the average tax rate for nearly all PAYE workers has fallen every year including the last two years. In no case has it increased.
- A married couple with two children and one partner earning the average industrial wage now receives more in child benefit than they pay in tax and PRSI.
- Take home pay for the average industrial earner is up about €10,200 since 1997, an 80 per cent increase.
- No-one now pays more than half of overtime in tax and PRSI.

to use the potential of the tax credit system to effectively target changes and to pursue further improvements in the income tax regime if economic resources permit.

- In the last budget we increased the entry point to the income tax system for a single PAYE worker from €23 per week to €46 per week by increasing the employee tax credit specifically to help those on lowest pay.

We will complete the reduction of the standard rate of corporation tax to 12.5 % in 2003

- This was achieved in Budget 2003 while still increasing our corporation tax base. This has yielded over €5 billion in revenue, up from €2 billion when the rate was 36% in 1997.

We will vigorously pursue actions to ensure that everyone is tax compliant

- Further powers have been given to Revenue to pursue tax evaders whether in the State or offshore.
- Over one billion euro has been collected to date from more vigorous tax compliance measures in the recent past.
- Various tax dodges and loopholes have been closed off.
- Tax relief schemes have been more tightly focused and time limited to increase their effectiveness and contain their cost.

Delivering Major Capital Programmes

Fianna Fáil and the Progressive Democrats will address Ireland's infrastructural deficit in a coherent and determined way over the next five years.

- The Government has accorded top priority to investment in economic and social infrastructure. We have more than delivered on our financial commitments to this priority in the National Development Plan.
- In recognition of the key importance of the NDP National Roads Programme, Exchequer investment in 2004 will be €1.3 billion
- We will continue to invest in infrastructure as a priority in sustaining economic and social progress. Investment in the Public Capital Programme in 2003 amounted to €8.5 billion.
- Continuing this commitment, the Public Capital Programme for 2004 has increased the provision for capital expenditure by nearly 13 per cent, or €1 billion, over the 2003 figure to €9.5 billion.

We believe that new methods of financing major capital developments are required. These must take account of the need to maximise efficiency, delivery, value for money and appropriate risk transfer across complex multi-annual programmes.

- We have opened up new opportunities for private companies to invest in public infrastructure through PPP projects.
- We believe this investment should contribute to relieving infrastructural bottlenecks while ensuring optimal value for money.
- Enactment of the *State Authorities (Public Private Partnerships Arrangements) Act 2002* has provided the necessary statutory framework for moving the PPP programme forward. The establishment of the NDFA, as both an advisory body for procuring authorities and a potential source of funding for projects, has further strengthened the institutional structures within which PPP operates.
- In addition to the water and waste management sectors, PPP projects are also being developed in the sustainable energy, urban regeneration and housing sectors, as are as a broad range of projects across local government.

We will establish under the auspices of the NTMA a National Development Finance Agency (NDFA) to finance major public projects and to evaluate financing options for PPP projects. This vehicle may finance both commercial and non-commercial type projects.

and,

The NDFA will enable the government to apply commercial standards in evaluating financial risks, costs and options associated with projects thereby ensuring that the best financing package is availed of in each instance. The NDFA may compete with, but will not substitute for, private financing of PPP projects but will be an additional mechanism to be used in the context of achieving value for money and risk transfer in PPP projects.

- The National Development Finance Agency has now been established on a statutory basis and its board appointed.
- The board recently appointed the Agency's first chief executive.
- The Agency will play an important part in the Government's resolve to address the country's infrastructural deficit.

Where significant once-off revenues accrue to the state through, for example, the sale of assets or the restructuring of the Central Bank, we will use these revenues to create a National Transformation Fund. This fund, which will be managed by the NTMA, will be used to finance multi-annual infrastructural development programmes.

- The Minister for Finance is working on putting the necessary arrangements in place to utilise the proceeds realised from the sale of State assets for investment in infrastructure.

EMPLOYMENT AND ENTERPRISE

The huge increase in employment and fall in unemployment which has been achieved in recent years cannot be taken for granted. Work is still required to protect employment levels and to expand both the distribution and quality of opportunity throughout the country.

We will encourage and support multinational and indigenous firms to develop higher productivity and knowledge-based activities which are likely to be retained during periods of global rationalisation.

- In 2003 Ireland was the only country in the EU to enjoy a sharp increase in FDI, more than doubling its inflow, according to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. Ireland also increased its market share of inward manufacturing greenfield investment into Europe by three percentage points. And the US Department of Commerce again confirmed that Ireland continues to consistently give the best rate of return to US companies investing in the EU.
- Endorsing Ireland's position as a good location for inward investment, a range of the 64 new projects we negotiated during the year included world leaders in some key new areas of global business such as Google, eBay/PayPal and Overture (now Yahoo) setting up key European centres in internet services, Ingersoll Rand making Ireland the centre for its global sales and service activities, HVB Bank headquartering its extensive property and real estate portfolio management in Ireland and SAP, Europe's leading software company setting up its global technical support centre here. Examples such as these give us confidence that Ireland is continuing to be an attractive location for inward investment.
- During 2003, Enterprise Ireland client companies involved in research, development, production and sale of sophisticated products and services performed best in securing new export contracts.

- Enterprise Ireland will continue to focus on four main areas: achieving export sales, promoting innovation and productivity, creating start-up companies and driving regional enterprise. These objectives are central to Enterprise Ireland's mission and will develop, strengthen and secure growth within Irish firms.
- The type of foreign direct investment now on offer to Ireland is changing. It shows a continuing trend to higher value manufacturing and service-based activities. Investments of this type require continuing improvements in education and skills and in infrastructure, especially in regional locations. Regional growth is a key priority for IDA Ireland. To continue high levels of economic development in the regions in the future, the creation of key centres of growth, spread across the country, is essential.
- Shannon Development has pursued similar policies to the other agencies and reports resilient jobs performance, despite the economic climate, in both the indigenous sector in the region and in the Shannon Free Zone. 1,499 new jobs were created by assisted companies in the region in 2003 bringing overall employment in these companies to 19,754.

We will encourage a better spread of jobs throughout the country.

- The 2002 census showed that employment has grown strongly in every county since the last census in 1996. The government is determined that strong national employment growth will continue to be felt throughout the regions. Over 53,000 new jobs were created in the last year.
- Recently, Ireland has secured a €1.6bn investment by Intel in Kildare and Guidant announced a major expansion at Clonmel that will lead to 1,000 more jobs.
- Continued strong investment in Ireland by international companies supports Ireland's strategy to become a top global location for high value jobs throughout the country.
- The enterprise agencies under the remit of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment are working to ensure this commitment is met.
- IDA Ireland continued to successfully fulfil its policy of balanced regional development in 2003. 60% of all the new investment projects (both greenfield and expansion) negotiated in 2003 were for locations in regional areas outside of Dublin and Cork.
- In the North West the positive contributions from the investment decisions by Prumerica, PacificCare and MBNA in recent years are now having a major impact on the transition of that region's foreign direct investment portfolio from a previous dependency on traditional manufacturing sectors. For example, in 2000 international/financial traded services had no foothold in the region and now thirty per cent of employment in IDA supported companies in the region comes from these sectors.
- The medical technologies sector is also making an important contribution to regional development, with the foreign owned element of this sector now employing over 17,000 in some 40 different cities and towns throughout Ireland. A number of companies in the sector expanded, adding new higher value activities to their operations during the year.
- Some highlights during the year covered by the report include Abbot's expansion in Longford; greenfield investment in Sligo, Olympus Diagnostica's expansion in Co Clare, Hamac in Castlerea, and Inamed in Arklow.
- A key part of Enterprise Ireland's focus is on building and supporting businesses around the country that are, or have the potential to be, fast-growing successful enterprises. Growing the number and size of international, Irish-owned businesses in all parts of the country is crucial to our economic development and central to balanced regional development, in line with the National Spatial Strategy.

- Enterprise Ireland's policy objectives for balanced regional development are reflected in the structure of its funding offer. For example, funding for existing company expansion is biased towards the Border, Midland and Western (BMW) region and the South-East, South-West and Mid-West regions. Enterprise Ireland provides preferential funding for companies, with detailed export plans, who are expanding or establishing a business in the BMW Region. The maximum grant level is higher than in Dublin and the Mid-East and a higher proportion of this funding is also non-repayable.
- In addition, of the 14 venture capital funds in which investment was made in 2003, four have specific regional commitments, whereby 50% of their investment must be outside Dublin.
- Shannon Development is responsible for both foreign direct investment and the promotion of indigenous Irish industry in the Shannon Free Zone and for Irish industry in the remainder of the Shannon Region (Limerick, Clare, North Tipperary, North Kerry and South West Offaly).
- Shannon Development devises strategies to ensure a proper intra-regional spatial development balance. The Knowledge Enterprise Network is a particularly good example of ensuring that all parts of the Shannon Region have the best possible opportunity to get their share of development activity.

We will carry out a fundamental review of training and employment supports to ensure that they focus on the needs of the most marginalised and disadvantaged groups to help them to progress to the open labour market.

- The Review of the Active Labour Market Programmes (including CE, JI, Education, Training and Back to Work Programmes), mandated by the PPF, has been concluded without reaching a consensus on either the review or draft recommendations. Notwithstanding this, the considerable input from individual members of the Committee was noted and the views expressed by representatives continue to inform current discussions.
- The future structure of the Community Employment programme is under review by a group of senior officials and FAS, and this group is expected to report to Ministers on the outcome of their deliberations in the near future. The outcome of this review will inform any future adjustments in the structure and the terms and conditions of participation on community employment.

We support the positive role of the Community Employment Scheme to meet the needs of both the long-term unemployed and communities.

- The total funding allocation for employment schemes in 2004 has been fixed at €351 million, which will support up to 25,000 places across the three employment schemes: community employment, job initiative and social economy.
- FÁS is being given some flexibility in the management of this financial allocation to maximise progression to the labour market while at the same time facilitating the support of community services.

We will seek to ensure that new social economy projects are effectively targeted at areas which have traditionally had a high dependence on CE;

and,

We will develop the value of the social economy programme through the further creation of social economic enterprises.

- The Social Economy Programme supports the development and operation of enterprises that provide locally demanded services in and for disadvantaged communities, and meaningful employment opportunities for long-term unemployed and other disadvantaged persons.

- The budget for the Programme in 2003 was €30.7m with an actual expenditure of €36.025m. The allocation is being increased in 2004 to over €40m which will cover enterprises approved to date. This is part of the overall allocation of €351m which is being provided to support up to 25,000 places across the three employment schemes – Community Employment (CE), Job Initiative (JI) and the Social Economy Programme (SEP).
- By end 2003, 334 enterprises had commenced operations employing 2,370 grant-supported employees. A review of the Social Economy Programme was recently undertaken and is currently being considered by the Social Economy Monitoring Committee, FAS and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. The review will inform the future direction of the programme.

We will introduce new supports for those experiencing or likely to experience severe employability barriers. This will involve a training fund of up to €2,500 per person.

- The High Supports Process (HSP) was officially launched in January 2003. A budget of €1.2million was assigned for the piloting of the HSP in 7 regions in 2003. The groupings identified for inclusion in this pilot include long-term participants on the Job Initiative Scheme, those defined as Not Progression Ready under the Preventive strategy as well as those to be referred under the full roll out of the strategy.
- The HSP continues to operate in 2004 with a budget of €1.3m.

We will extend the Employment Action Plan Preventative strategy to all persons on the Live Register for longer than six months.

- We have extended the Employment Action Plan approach to all those aged up to 55 who pass six months on the Live Register from March 2003 and in addition to all those *on* the Live Register for more than 9 months living in designated High Unemployment Areas under RAPID.
- Referrals to FAS in respect of those over six months on the Live Register, who are under 55 and had not been previously through the EAP commenced in May 2003. Initial referrals began in the Dublin region and rolled out to all other regions by end of 2003.

FÁS will engage with redundant workers and people facing the prospect of long-term unemployment to ensure that the period out of work for a substantial number of people is kept to a minimum.

- During 2003, of the 10,537 under-25s approaching six months on the Live Register referred to FÁS, 6,516 (62%) had signed off the Live Register.
- Of the 12,112, 25-34 year olds approaching 6 and 9 months on the Live Register referred to FAS, 7,152 had signed off the Live Register.
- Of the 9,159, 35-44 year olds approaching six and nine months on the Live Register referred to FÁS during 2003, 4,947 (54%) had signed off the Live Register.
- Of the 6,108, 45-54 year olds approaching six and nine months on the Live Register referred to FAS 3,122 (51%) had signed off.

We will give a fresh impetus to the important role of small business in Ireland and ensure that the interests of small business are taken into account in formulating and implementing policies that impact on the enterprise sector.

- Further meetings of the Round Table for Small Business were held during the past year. The Round Table was established to provide a forum for consultation and dialogue with small business in Ireland on an ongoing basis.
- Among the issues discussed at the last meetings were the factors contributing to high inflation, the E.U Green Paper on Entrepreneurship, the new arrangements for Public Procurement as well as the level of investment in innovation and the supports available for R&D performance by SMEs in Ireland.
- Under the Border, Midland and Western Regional Operational Programme and the Southern and Eastern Regional Operational Programme of the NDP for 2000-2006, the City and County Enterprise Boards (CEBs) continue to support the development of micro-enterprises with a progressive move to non-financial supports such as advice, mentoring, and management development.

We will seek to resolve potential issues, difficulties and conflicts in the spirit of social partnership.

- We have agreed to consult with the social partners as appropriate on policy proposals and the design of the implementation arrangements in respect of matters covered by the Agreement *Sustaining Progress*.
- *Sustaining Progress* provides for the continuation, with an enhanced role, of the National Implementation Body (NIB) which was established under the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness to ensure the delivery of the industrial relations stability and peace provisions of *Sustaining Progress*.

Through the Expert Group on Future Skills we will identify the priority skills needs of the economy and work to adjust education and training provision accordingly.

- The Expert Group on Future Skills is the mechanism through which the priority skills needs of the economy and necessary adjustments to education and training provision are being identified on an ongoing basis. The mandate of the Group was broadened in 2003 to incorporate the work of the former National Training Advisory Council.
- The Fourth Report of The Expert Group on Future Skills (October 2003), covering the period 2002/2003, was the topic of a Debate in the Seanad in January 2004. The Report contains 10 Chapters, which highlight the future skills needs of key sectors in the economy including ICT, biotechnology, construction, logistics and food processing and occupations such as engineering and financial services.
- The Report also explores the importance of generic skills for organisational success and includes a review of the overall labour market.
- In 2003 the Group published reports on its research on skills needs in Food Processing, Engineering and Engineering Technician, Construction and Biotechnology. Reports were also published on A National Survey of Vacancies in the Public Sector 2001/2002 and on Benchmarking Education and Training for Economic Development.

We will vigorously pursue a programme for regulatory reform with particular emphasis on removing unwarranted constraints on competition in all sectors of the economy and placing the consumer at the top of the policy agenda.

- The Companies (Auditing and Accounting) Act 2003 was enacted in December 2003. One of the key features of the Act is the establishment of the Irish Auditing and Accounting Supervisory Authority.

- The central objective of the legislation is to ensure that the regulatory structures governing auditors and accountants in Ireland meets with the best international practice. It will also apportion new responsibilities between the various parties involved with corporate governance.
- The Company Law Review Group has completed its second work programme. In this programme the Review Group focused on sectoral reform in a number of areas within company law, such as share capital, accounts and audit, as well as working closely with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment on translating the recommendations in the Group's First Report into the General Scheme of a Bill to consolidate and reform company law.
- Effective enforcement of competition and consumer legislation is being pursued by the Competition Authority and the Director of Consumer Affairs. The Authority has concentrated particular effort on anti-cartel activities, studies of the professions, banking and insurance sectors and advocacy of competition. The Director is enforcing a wide range of consumer protection measures, including the new unit pricing regulations of 2003.
- We also recently established the Consumer Strategy Group to re-energise and take forward the consumer agenda for the coming years, with particular focus on consumer prices, the consumer voice and the modernisation of consumer legislation.
- Proposals will also be brought to Government in the coming months for a Bill which will codify the liquor licensing laws. The codification will have two aspects: firstly, a consolidation of the liquor licensing law which is currently spread across many statutes into a single instrument; secondly, a reform of the licensing law drawing on the recommendations of the Commission on Liquor Licensing and the Strategic Task Force on Alcohol.

IMPROVING THE CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT

The Safety Health and Welfare at Work Act 1989 will be updated.

- The Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Bill 2004 will significantly strengthen the provisions dealing with safety management, safety training, safety consultation, safety representation, offences and penalties. There has been extensive consultation with the Social Partners in regard to the Bill.

The recommendations of the review of the statutory redundancy scheme will be examined with a view to implementation.

- The Report of the Redundancy Review Group 2002, included the agreement of the social partners to legislative improvements that would simplify the Redundancy scheme.
- The Redundancy Payments Act 2003, which was enacted by the Oireachtas in May 2003, provided for increases in Redundancy benefits and major simplifications to the scheme as agreed in the Report of the Redundancy Review Group.
- In the context of this Act, government agreed to provide €1 million from the Social Insurance Fund to provide a new IT system. Work on this new IT system is proceeding.

A fundamental review will be undertaken of the functions of the Employment Rights Bodies.

- A Review Group made up of the Employment Rights Bodies within the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Labour Court, Employment Appeals Tribunal, Rights Commissioners, the Labour Relations Commission and the Equality Tribunal), together with the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform was established in the Department in September 2003 to carry out a review of the functions of the employment rights bodies as outlined in the programme.

- The review concluded in April 2004 and a report will be presented to Government after the Social Partners have been consulted.

We will strengthen the parental leave scheme in line with the recommendations of the social partners.

- We are committed under *Sustaining Progress* to strengthening the Parental Leave Scheme in line with the agreed recommendations of the social partners arising from the Working Group on Parental Leave.
- This will require amending primary legislation to provide for a range of improvements as detailed in *Sustaining Progress*. The Government is committed to having this legislation enacted before Summer 2005.

We will review ways in which older people can be encouraged, where they so wish, to extend their working lives without financial penalty and in conditions which suit their personal lifestyle wishes.

- The Review will be published later this year and will, inter alia, deal with issues relating to removing the requirement whereby a person reaching 65 years of age must first retire for a period before being able to work and retain a portion of their pension.
- The Review will examine and seek to remove other financial disincentives for people of pension age who want to consider some form of employment.
- The possibility of allowing people to defer claiming pension and to receive a higher rate when they do claim is also being looked at in the context of this Review.

We will request the National Centre for Partnership and Performance (NCP) to establish a forum on the workplace of the future to help establish a comprehensive agenda on this issue.

- Following the publication of a consultation paper in July, 2003, setting out the main themes for discussion at the Forum on the Workplace of the Future, three national surveys of employers and employees, commissioned by the Centre and carried out by the ESRI have also been completed and published. Over 5,000 employees and 2,000 employers in the private and public sectors took part in these surveys, helping to build an accurate picture of the experiences and expectations in Irish workplaces. The responses to these surveys and the submissions received on foot of the consultation paper provide a basis for the deliberations of the Forum.
- The Forum held its opening session in Dublin Castle on 6-7 October, 2003. The second meeting of the Forum took place on 4 February, 2004, and the third on 28 April, 2004. The most recent session of the Forum was held on 27 and 28 June, 2004, which concentrated on issues relating to the private sector. A further session is provisionally planned for September 2004, and the Forum is due to report in Autumn, 2004.

RESEARCH, DEVELOPMENT AND INNOVATION

We believe that ongoing action is required to ensure that Ireland continues to be a world leader in the knowledge-based industries.

We will ensure the putting in place of open-access broadband on a national basis.

- The 19 Town Metropolitan Area Network Broadband Programme is on time, on budget and on target.
- Our radical €140 million Broadband Action Plan was launched in December 2003.

- This Plan expands the current programme of local authority infrastructure in 19 regional towns with an aim to bring low-cost broadband to every Irish town with a population of over 1500.
- For rural areas with a population of less than 1500 we have established a Group Scheme where Government funding will be provided to assist the capital outlay to provide broadband.

We will ensure that the full range of options, including wireless technologies, are utilised to expand broadband access in rural areas.

- Our €140 million Broadband Action Plan is technology neutral. All technologies to be included in the expanded programme.
- The new Group Broadband Scheme will also allow for deployment of wireless technologies.
- ComReg has issued new 3.5 GhZ licences to facilitate the provision of wireless broadband services.
- Our plan to bring broadband to every primary, secondary and special needs school in the country will involve all technologies.

We will create real competition for local phone services by ensuring the unbundling of the local loop.

- Regulations permitting local loop unbundling are now in place.

We will drive forward the Schools IT programme based on the principle of school-based planning and devolved funding. We will ensure that progressive training courses are available to teachers.

- Since 1998 some €140m has been made available for the schools' IT programme in order to realise the Government's vision of preparing all students for the information age.
- Over 80% of teachers have received training in the use of ICT in schools. Further training/support is being provided to meet identified needs.
- Since 1998, average pupil/computer ratios have been reduced from 35:1 to 11:1 at primary level and from 16:1 to 9:1 at second level.
- Internet access has been provided to all schools. A major €18 million initiative has been agreed with the telecoms industry which will see broadband connectivity delivered to every school in the country by the end of 2005.
- A comprehensive new strategy for enhancing the role of ICT in primary and post-primary education is at an advanced stage of preparation.

We will work to ensure that Ireland develops a world-class research capacity. We also recognise the importance of encouraging a dynamic research culture and will continue to support research on the basis of recognising the distinct, but also inter-connected roles of different programmes, from individual grants up to more targeted support for areas of national strategic interest.

and,

We will ensure that the Programme for Research in Third-Level Institutions administered by the Higher Education Authority on behalf of the Government is maintained with funding rounds being placed on a multi-annual basis.

- Since the launch of the dedicated programme of research in third-level institutions, awards totalling €10 million have been made and the impact has been significant. The key achievements include:
 - New research funding to 15 third level institutions in total, including 6 Institutes of Technology
 - 19 Research Centres completed to date
 - 62 new and expanded research programmes established
 - 40 new inter-institutional programmes/initiatives have been established
 - Over 4,000 peer reviewed publications to date arising from PRTLTI funded programmes (over 4.5years)
 - PRTLTI Cycle 3 under way in 2004 with a commitment of €140 million

We will build the capability of firms to carry out and manage R&D in Ireland.

- The 2004 Budget announced the introduction of a tax credit of 20% for incremental R&D expenditure. This measure will help to enhance our competitiveness as a location for new internationally mobile research-related investment, and also encourage existing overseas and indigenous firms to add research functions to their operations in Ireland or to increase their level of research activity.

We will place Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) on a statutory basis as a dynamic vehicle to provide funding for areas of strategic national importance including ICTs and Biotechnology.

- Science Foundation Ireland (SFI), was established on a statutory basis by the Industrial Development (Science Foundation Ireland) Act in July 2003. A new Board was appointed in July 2003.
- At end March 2004, SFI had made commitments of over €338 million – Biotechnology €146 million and ICTs €189 million – to approximately 179 researchers and their teams working in areas such as materials science, nanotechnology, photonics, software engineering, genomics, proteomics and neuroscience.

We will bring together the Irish Research Council for Science, Engineering and Technology and the Irish Council for Humanities and Social Sciences Research as parts of a new council

- At the request of the Government the HEA has undertaken detailed review and analysis, drawing on international experience, with a view to identifying favoured options for the development of a statutory framework for the two councils.
- These options are now under consideration with a view to advancing proposals in the context of wider legislative change that is anticipated to emerge following completion of the OECD review of Higher Education.

We will ensure that all major research funding is based on external assessments.

- Each of the research programmes in the higher education area is funded on a competitive basis.
- All proposals for funding under each of the research programmes put in place in the higher education area are externally evaluated and any approval to funding is based on standards of excellence under stated criteria.
- For example, under PRTLTI, proposals are competitively considered at institutional level before submission for evaluation by an independent international panel of distinguished researchers and scholars under three excellence criteria (strategic planning, research quality and impact in improving the quality of teaching in the institution).

In order to ensure that structures and mechanisms for overseeing national policy on research are improved, we will implement change on an agreed basis.

- March 2002, we requested the Irish Council for Science, Technology and Innovation (ICSTI) to convene In a Commission (chaired by the ICSTI Chairman, Dr Ed Walsh and commonly referred to as the “Walsh Commission”) to bring forward specific proposals for an appropriate framework for dealing with issues of National Policy for Research and Technological Development.
- The Commission reported in December 2002. Following consideration of the report the Government has established a new governance structure for overseeing national policy on Research and Development and has appointed Ireland's first Chief Science Adviser.

We will work to ensure that Ireland maximises its draw down under the EU Sixth Framework Programme for Research and Development.

- The EU Sixth Framework Programme for Research and Development (FP6) runs from 2003 to 2006 with a total budget of €6.27 billion. The overall performance by Ireland in the first calls under FP6 has shown significant improvement over earlier years. Irish interests have secured support of some €50m from the first year of a four-year programme. This compares favourably with FP5 when the national four-year take was €120m.

We will actively support research collaboration between firms and third level institutions.

- The Commercialisation Fund to bring research ideas to commercial reality was launched in 2003. Over €16.9 million was committed to 116 high quality applied research initiatives in emerging technologies of interest to companies.
- A further €1.5m was invested in university and other third level groups working with companies to deliver particular applied research initiatives and other transfers of high technology knowledge requested by them. In the Informatics area, projects were supported in digital media and eLearning, content management, eBusiness and bioinformatics.
- Researchers wishing to continue developing ideas through campus companies are eligible for business development support from Enterprise Ireland.
- Work continued in the past year on developing the infrastructure of the regional Institutes of Technology, focusing on providing incubation centres for high-potential start-up campus enterprises and collaboration between the institutes and local industry. This brings the total number of such incubator centres in Institutes of Technology to 14 nationwide.
- €5m was approved for incubation space in Sligo and Limerick in 2003, bringing the total for such investment to €30m. A further €2.3m was made available for their management and business development support.

We will seek to improve structures and practices to enhance commercialisation of publicly funded research.

- In April 2004, ICSTI published the National Code of Practice for Management of Intellectual Property arising from 100% publicly funded research.
- The aim of the Code is to build on existing knowledge and expertise and to harmonise IP management systems across public research organisations (PROs). The Code of Practice provides a framework for commercialisation of public investment in Irish R&D.

- PROs are encouraged to adopt the Code on a voluntary basis, to ensure that robust, harmonised IP management systems are in place to deliver on commercialisation. ICSTI are now drawing up a similar Code for public private partnerships.

We will review available fiscal instruments for the support of advanced connectivity.

- In support of the policy of ensuring that Ireland's relative international position in this area is maintained, the Minister for Finance agreed, in November 2002, a capital investment envelope for the rollout of Metropolitan Area Networks throughout the country for the period 2003-2004; total investment being €65m. Already, Exchequer investment stands at €35m.
- We have ensured that home broadband connectivity is exempt from normal benefit-in-kind restrictions.
- Proposals for changed benefits-in-kind treatment regarding teleworking are currently with the Minister for Finance.

We will implement an ambitious eGovernment agenda aimed at ensuring that the public will be able to access most key Government services electronically.

- The Information Society Commission published a report on e-Government in November 2003. Significantly, the Commission cautioned about putting services online purely for the sake of it, and recommended that only services with a tangible benefit that make economic sense should be put online. The Cabinet Committee agreed over 80 services that individual departments have identified as online priorities.
- The REACH Agency is concentrating with individual agencies on the development of services for online delivery, in keeping with the aim of having services online by 2005. In addition, REACH have compiled a wider index of over 900 services spanning information, forms, online and interactive services currently featured on public sector websites in Ireland. The index currently concentrates on departments and their agencies, but later will incorporate all public services, including health and local authority services.
- In April 2004, the Government published the 2nd progress report on New Connections, its Action Plan for the development of the Information Society.

We will support the establishment, following competitive funding procedures, of interactive science centres and awareness programmes aimed at enhancing knowledge and interest in science.

- The Report of the Task Force on the Physical Sciences recommended that all science promotional activities should be drawn together to maximise effectiveness.
- A new integrated awareness programme, Discover Science & Engineering, managed by Forfás, was launched by the Taoiseach in October 2003 to link and expand on existing awareness activities in a way that provides a more focused and effective return. The underlying aims of Discover Science & Engineering are to raise the general level of awareness and understanding of the physical sciences amongst the public and to promote a positive attitude towards careers in Science, Engineering and Technology.
- Exploration Station, a custom designed interactive learning centre for children and young adults, with a predominantly scientific theme, was announced by the Tánaiste in December 2003. Exploration Station will also be an education and outreach centre for teachers and pupils with exhibits and programmes developed to complement the National Curriculum and will open its doors, subject to necessary planning permissions, in 2006.

We will actively promote the study of physics, chemistry and maths.

- A revised syllabus in Junior Certificate Science has been finalised and has been introduced on an optional basis in 2003/04. Some 614 schools are providing the new syllabus at present. The revised syllabus has an increased emphasis on scientific investigation and on hands-on student practical work.
- In contrast to most countries in the OECD, the number of students taking physics and chemistry in the 2002 Leaving Certificate examination showed an increase over the previous year. There was a further increase in 2003.
- A joint committee of the Department of Education and Science and Forfás continued to progress the recommendations of the Task Force on the Physical Sciences as resources permit.
- €16 million in capital expenditure exclusively for science labs and equipment for the introduction of the new junior science syllabus.
- A new Junior Certificate Maths syllabus has been examined for the first time in June 2003 at three levels. Calculators have also been permitted as part of this examination for the first time.
- The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment is re-examining the structure of the Mathematics curriculum at Senior Cycle level.

INSURANCE AND ROAD SAFETY

We will take a comprehensive set of actions to address the rate of injuries and deaths on our roads and we will tackle high costs of insurance, in particular motor and employer liability cover.

We will take actions to improve road safety and driver behaviour, to reduce the legal cost of accident claims and to make the insurance market more consumer-friendly.

And,

Work on the penalty points system will be completed to ensure its implementation at an early date.

- The Penalty Points system has been operating since 31st October 2002 for the offence of breaching a speed limit, from 1st June 2003 for insurance offences and from 25th August 2003 for seat belt wearing offences. The system was recently extended to include the offence of careless driving with effect from 4th June 2004.
- Penalty Points have had a major impact on bringing about changes in driver behaviour. In the first 17 months of the system, there were over 100 fewer deaths than for the same period before the system came in. The number of road fatalities in 2003 was the lowest on record since the early 1960's.

We will implement urgently the recommendations of the Motor Insurance Advisory Board (MIAB).

- Over 30 of the 67 MIAB recommendations have been implemented.
- Many more of the MIAB recommendations are dealt with in the Civil Liability and Courts Bill 2004 which was passed by the Oireachtas in the last session. The Bill deals with commitments in the area of personal injuries/civil liability, including a shortening of the period in which claims must be lodged, a requirement to swear an affidavit in support of claims and a specific provision to disallow false and exaggerated claims.

- In addition to the reforms proposed in the Civil Liability and Courts Bill, 2004, the Committee on Court Practice and Procedure is examining all aspects of practice and procedure relating to personal injuries litigation.
- Furthermore, the Minister for Transport signed a revised agreement with the Motor Insurers' Bureau of Ireland on 31 March 2004 providing for new arrangements for compensation for victims of uninsured, unidentified or untraced drivers, to provide enhanced customer service and reduce the risk of fraudulent claims.

We will enact the legislation required to provide for the new IFSRA which will regulate insurance in the consumer interest.

- The Irish Financial Services Regulatory Authority was established in 2003 following the enactment of the Central Bank and Financial Services Authority of Ireland Bill 2002.

We will support the achievement of a single EU market in Insurance.

- Supporting the Single Market in Insurance is ongoing. In particular, the work being done by a working group of the insurance committee to establish a common approach to guarantee schemes, initiated by Ireland, is progressing well.
- This work is designed to ensure that all EU customers of an insurance company doing business across borders can expect similar treatment as regards compensation schemes if the insurer fails.

The costs of insurance claims will be reduced by a series of actions we will take to reform civil law procedures, as set out in the section of this Programme for Government on Crime and Law Reform.

- The Civil Liability and Courts Bill has been passed by the Oireachtas. It contains measures to reduce the costs of insurance claims by tightening procedures and by increasing penalties for claims fraud.

We will establish the Personal Injuries Assessment Board (PIAB);

- The PIAB 2003 Act was signed into law on the 28th December 2003. It is now fully operational. It commenced the handling of all employee liability claims from June 2004, and from July 22nd 2004 all public and motor claims were referred to it.

We will ensure improved standards of driving by establishing a training scheme for new drivers. Initially the scheme will be voluntary and will aim to attract lower insurance premiums for those who participate. If this voluntary scheme is successful we will consider making it compulsory.

- The introduction of a new training scheme for drivers is dependent on registration of driving instructors, which is being considered in the context of the establishment of a Driver Testing and Standards Authority, the legislation for which will be published shortly.

We will bring forward road safety measures and safe driving education in the secondary school curriculum.

- Road Safety is included as an integral aspect of the Personal Safety component of the SPHE programme. The scope for further development will be examined in the context of the

development of an SPHE syllabus at senior cycle, and in the context of restructuring proposals for the senior cycle and the reconfiguration of subjects, transition units and short courses.

A renewed three-year Road Safety strategy will be introduced to target speeding, drink driving, seat belt wearing and pedestrian safety in order to significantly reduce road deaths and injuries.

- The High Level Group on Road Safety has prepared a new Strategy for the period 2004 – 2006 and the Government approved the publication of the Strategy on 17 February 2004.
- The Road Traffic Bill 2004 will include legislation addressing issues such as the introduction of full random breath testing, the operation of a network of speed cameras by the private sector, making the use of hand held mobile phones while driving illegal, and prohibiting the sale or supply of cars to minors.

We will establish a dedicated Traffic Corps

- A detailed consultation process involving the Departments of Transport, Justice, Equality and Law Reform and the Garda Síochána is being progressed.
- We are also examining the position internationally in order to establish the practice in other EU States.

The high cost of business insurance is undermining enterprise and job creation. We will take actions to limit the cost of public liability insurance on business. The civil law reform measures we will take will be central. In particular:

- We will establish a set of guidelines for damages for particular injuries.

- A Book of Quantum has been drawn up by the Personal Injuries Assessment Board for particular injuries which will serve as a guideline in respect of damages.

We will initiate urgent consultations on the issue of making employer liability insurance compulsory in order to benefit from bonding/compensation arrangements.

- Extensive consultations have taken place with the social partners in connection with the areas of cost and availability of insurance. These consultations coupled with the recommendations made by the Motor Insurance Advisory Board (MIAB) resulted in the establishment of the Government's Insurance Reform Programme.
- A comprehensive set of recommendations emerged on foot of both the MIAB report and the consultations that took place with the social partners. Making employers' liability insurance compulsory did not emerge as an issue. Consequently the reform programme has focused on implementing the recommendations which emerged.
- The MIAB report was the most comprehensive study and analysis of the Irish Motor Insurance Industry ever undertaken in this country. The analysis, conclusions and recommendations extend to other areas of liability insurance, including employer liability insurance, and provide a sound basis for addressing the problems.

We will require certain forms of action to be supported by sworn affidavits so as to create a liability of perjury for fraudulent claims.

- Measures to achieve this are contained in the Civil Liability and Courts Bill which was passed by both Houses of the Oireachtas.

- **We will ban no foal no fee advertising by solicitors.**

This was implemented by the Solicitors (Amendment) Act 2002 and the Solicitors (Advertising) Regulations 2002, both of which became fully operational in this regard on 1 February 2003.

DEVELOPING THE REGIONS & THE ISLANDS

We will complete and implement the National Spatial Strategy, which is aimed at ensuring that all the regions develop to their potential.

- The National Spatial Strategy (NSS) was published in November 2002.
- The Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government is leading the implementation of the NSS, through establishing and supporting the necessary interaction, monitoring and other mechanisms to ensure consistency between the NSS and the spatial aspects of relevant policies and programmes.
- Structures and mechanisms to integrate the NSS into planning and activities at Government, Departmental, State Agency, regional and local levels have been put in place to ensure that it directs the spatial aspects of public sector planning, policies and programmes, including the determination of investment priorities. An Inter-Departmental Committee was established in 2003 to oversee and assist with this process.
- The NSS is currently being rolled out through regional and local authorities. Regional Planning Guidelines (RPGs) have been prepared for all regions to further implementation of the NSS at regional level. Local authorities are taking account of the NSS in the preparation and adoption of their Development Plans, variations to Development Plans, Local Area Plans and other plans and strategies.
- Integrated planning frameworks will be put in place for the gateways and hubs identified in the NSS. A range of measures have already been undertaken in gateways and hubs to progress their status under the NSS.
- The Cabinet Sub-Committee on Housing, Infrastructure and Public Private Partnerships is monitoring the implementation of the NSS.
- A report setting out progress made to date on implementation of the NSS has been finalised for submission to the Social Partners.
- There has been substantial progress on the major NDP capital investment programmes supporting more balanced regional development, particularly in providing key regional linkages under the roads programmes, and measures supporting the development of gateways, hubs and other large urban centres under the public transport and environmental services investment programmes.
- Government Estimates for 2004 and the Public Capital Programme have confirmed continued Government commitment to investment in the infrastructure needed to support balanced regional development, with public capital investment being held at close to 5% of GNP, which is twice the EU average.
- Multi-annual capital envelopes were announced in the last Budget, with provision being made in the bi-lateral agreements between the Department of Finance and other relevant Departments for those Departments to provide an annual statement showing, inter alia, how their overall priorities for each capital programme are consistent with the NSS.
- Guidelines have been issued to provide a policy framework setting out in detail how Government policy on rural housing as set out in the NSS is to be taken forward by local authorities in planning more effectively for rural areas.

While seeking to consolidate and enhance the international competitiveness of Dublin and our other main cities, we will further encourage a greater proportion of new inward investment to focus on areas outside the Greater Dublin Area, in line with the National Spatial Strategy.

- We are involved in ongoing contact with our agencies to ensure that their plans and strategies are fully in line with the policies of the National Spatial Strategy.
- Overall strategy is based on a Gateway approach to regional economic development, coinciding with the nine NSS gateways.
- The intention is that each gateway town will lead the economic development of its region through stimulating growth in its surrounding hinterland and a number of related towns and rural areas.
- Both IDA and Enterprise Ireland have re-focused their resources on regions outside Dublin, and particular account is taken of the needs of the BMW area in matters such as transport, roads, education and telecommunications infrastructure.

We will move forward the progressive decentralisation of Government Offices and Agencies, taking into account the National Spatial Strategy.

- The largest programme of decentralisation in the history of the State has been announced, involving 10,300 public service jobs relocating to over 50 provincial locations.
- The programme's implementation is now being actively progressed. The Decentralisation Implementation Group has been appointed and has already submitted its first report.
- The Central Applications Facility, through which public servants may apply for decentralisation to their preferred locations, is in place. The OPW is making considerable progress in terms of site/property acquisition, with a number of sites already acquired and the remaining expected to be acquired by the end of the year.

We will ensure that the particular development needs of the Border, Midlands and West region continue to be addressed.

- Our National Spatial Strategy (NSS) is a 20 year planning framework designed to enable every part of the country to grow and develop to its potential.
- It recognises that various regions of the country have different roles, and aims to organise and co-ordinate these roles in a complementary way.
- The objective of the NSS is to allow regions to become more competitive in terms of investment and job opportunities, while ensuring a high quality urban environment, as well as vibrant rural areas.
- The Strategy aims to build up the strengths of different areas in order to achieve more balanced regional development and population growth.
- It crucially recognises that a greater share of economic activity must take place outside the Greater Dublin Area.
- As part of the implementation of the NSS, each of the Regional Authorities in the BMW region will prepare Regional Planning Guidelines for its region.
- Draft Regional Planning Guidelines have now been prepared by the West, Border and Midland Regional Authorities and have completed a phase of public consultation.

- The work of the Western Development Commission in policy development, regional initiatives and the management of the Western Investment Fund continues.

The NDP capital development support for regional airports will be pushed through to a successful conclusion. A new three-year Public Service Obligation air service programme to regional airports will be launched this year.

- Grant-aid of approximately €9 million has been paid out to the six regional airports since the start of the NDP. Further NDP allocations will be considered shortly.
- A renewed three-year PSO air services programme to the regional airports was launched in 2002 in accordance with the Programme for Government and regular PSO air services are now operating to the regional airports.
- Following a recent review of the PSO air service programme, the Minister will consider proposals later this year to ensure that, in the long term, an appropriate level of air access to the regions can be delivered on the most cost-effective basis.
- Knock Airport received investment of €53,400 under the CLÁR programme in 2003.

We will significantly improve transport services in the regions.

- See section on 'Rural Transport' in this document.

We will extend the gas grid and ensure that significant investment is made in developing the electricity grid in the regions.

- A second sub-sea gas interconnector pipeline was built in 2002 linking Ireland with Scotland. This will ensure an adequate and continuous gas supply to meet growing demand.
- A cross-country pipeline was completed in 2002, effectively completing a robust national ringmain linking Dublin, Galway and Limerick into the existing grid.
- The Commission for Energy Regulation is presently running a competition to award the successful company gas supply franchise rights for Galway (including Oranmore), Ballinasloe, Athlone, Tullamore (including Clara) and Mullingar off the Pipeline to the West from mid 2004.
- We are developing the gas network on an all-island basis with a South/North interconnector linking Gormanston to Belfast and a pipeline between Belfast and Derry.
- Bord Gais Eireann has commenced planning on the South-North Pipeline between Dublin and Belfast, due for completion in 2006.
- We are currently working with the Commission for Energy Regulation and the Northern Ireland Authorities to progress the Derry to Letterkenny project. Interreg funding has been secured for a feasibility study and the Commission for Energy Regulation are currently evaluating tenders for the work.
- ESB continues to rollout its accelerated upgrading programme for the electricity grid. The programme, which covers the period 2002-7 and involves expenditure of around €4bn, focuses on the renewal and upgrade of Low, Medium and High voltage networks throughout the country.
- This renewal and reinforcement programme will cater for the strong increase in demand for electricity in the Irish market and will support development of the national economy.
- It includes the upgrading and renewal of networks built during the rural electrification era of the 1950s.

Islands

We will identify proposals to provide a subsidised cargo service to islands in consultation with island communities and ferry operators.

- An independent report in the matter has recently been presented to the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. Consultation is ongoing with island interests and other stakeholders, which will be taken into account by the Department in its analysis of the report.

We will provide a new fixed wing air service to Tory Island, Co. Donegal and Inisboffin, Co. Galway and upgrade the existing infrastructure at Inis Mór, Inis Meáin and Inis Óírr, Co. Galway.

- A winter helicopter service is provided to Tory, in addition to a regular subsidised ferry service.
- The Aran Islands are served by two subsidised ferry services (a passenger service from Ros an Mhíl and a service primarily for freight from Galway), together with regular air services from Connemara Airport.
- Planning permission has recently been obtained for the airstrip on Tory while tenders are expected to be sought for the Inishboffin airstrip very shortly. A sum of €238,300 has been approved by the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs for the upgrading of existing airstrip infrastructure on the Aran Islands.

We will provide Broadband technology to offshore islands.

- Under the new Group Broadband Scheme we will provide island communities with Government funding to assist in the capital outlay required to provide broadband technology to the islands.

We will introduce a home improvement grant, in line with the home improvement grants available to Gaeltacht Communities, to non-Gaeltacht islands, and will increase the level of new house grants on non-Gaeltacht islands to the same level as that available on Gaeltacht Islands.

- The new-house grant scheme was terminated in order to ensure a sustainable match between expenditure and resources, and to concentrate housing programmes on areas of greatest impact and social need.
- It is however proposed, in view of the exceptional costs arising in regard to construction on islands, to carry out research, which may form the basis of a case for progressing this objective.

We will include transport costs for schoolchildren as a constituent part of the Remote Area Grant.

- The Department of Education and Science and the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs are jointly considering how best to implement this policy initiative.

We will ensure that healthcare provision on the offshore islands is developed in line with the principles of the Health Strategy, particularly in relation to the expansion of primary care services.

- The Government remains committed to the ongoing development of healthcare services on the off-shore islands.

- We have expanded the GP service on the Aran Islands.
- The first Community Nursing Unit on an offshore island was opened this year.
- A new health centre was provided on Inis Turk
- We will continue to invest in these type of services.

We will establish Comhairle na nOileán.

- The Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, in conjunction with Comhdháil Oileáin na hÉireann, is considering ways to progress this objective. The administration grant recently approved for Comhdháil Oileáin na hÉireann will, inter alia, facilitate the organisation in pursuing such policy matters.

AN INTEGRATED TRANSPORT POLICY

“We will implement an integrated transport policy, designed as far as possible to overcome existing delays, bottlenecks and congestion and to provide alternative choice by alternative modes of transport. We also recognise the importance of competitive access transport and of maintaining a national airline.”

Integrated Transport

We will establish an integrated Department of Transport with responsibility for the national roads programme, aviation and public transport.

- The Department of Transport, through its Statement of Strategy 2003-2005 is committed to developing and implementing an integrated transport policy for Ireland, which will improve integration across transport modes, including air, bus, rail, road and sea.
- The Department is taking the lead role to ensure the integration of transport policy with other Government policies, through close collaboration with other Government Departments, local authorities and State Agencies.
- To this end, an Integrated Transport Unit together with cross-cutting teams representative of various transport sectors has been established in the Department. The Integrated Transport Unit is working closely with an Integration Cross-Cutting Team to produce integrated transport policy statements on a range of issues such as integrated land use and transport planning and modal shift. These policy statements will, over time, build into an integrated transport policy framework.

We will promote integrated ticketing and smart card technologies which will allow a differential pricing system to be introduced.

- The Railway Procurement Agency (RPA) has been given statutory responsibility for the implementation of an integrated ticketing system based on smartcard technologies for initial deployment in the Greater Dublin Area. The full smartcard-based integrated ticketing system remains, as scheduled to be in place by end 2005.
- In April 2004, with the co-operation and assistance of the RPA, a Private Operator (Morton’s) launched a smartcard based integrated ticketing system on its services. A similar smartcard system will be available on Luas services by the end of this year and Dublin Bus will follow next year.
- In advance of the introduction of full smartcard technologies, Bus Éireann, Bus Atha Cliath and Iarnród Éireann are already offering bus and rail integrated tickets for daily, weekly and monthly travel, based on magnetic strip technology.

We will introduce legislation to establish a new Greater Dublin Land Use and Transport Authority with a strong mandate to bring greater focus and better co-ordination to the implementation of this strategy and to land-use and transport issues generally.

- Proposals for institutional and regulatory reform of public transport were presented by the Minister for Transport to the Public Transport Partnership Forum (PTPF) in November 2002 and to the Oireachtas committee on Transport in June 2003.
- The principal elements of the proposals are:
 - The establishment of an independent procurement and regulatory authority for transport, on a national basis.
 - The introduction of competition into the bus market through regulated market opening, in the Dublin area in the form of 'franchising' of routes or groups of routes.
- These proposals are currently the subject of discussions with the CIE trade unions.

We will replace the Road Transport Act 1932 with modernised legislation to allow inter alia for new services in the bus market.

- The Minister for Transport outlined his proposals for regulatory reform of the public transport market at a meeting of the Public Transport Partnership Forum on 7 November 2002. In this statement, the Minister also recognised the need for updating legislation.

Further progress will be made on upgrading the bus fleet, providing bus priorities both in Dublin and other cities, and in increasing the level and frequency of service and the interchangeability of commuter tickets on bus and rail.

- 36 new buses have been ordered by Bus Átha Cliath for delivery in 2004, 34 of which have been delivered to date. These buses will be used to replace existing buses in the fleet.
- Construction of a new bus garage in Harristown, North Dublin is due for completion in December 2004. The new garage, with capacity for 240 buses, will allow for further fleet expansion and the transfer of buses/routes from existing depots to alleviate capacity problems.
- 65 expressway coaches have been ordered by Bus Éireann in 2004, 27 of which have been delivered.
- Bus Éireann is undertaking a major redevelopment of its existing station at Parnell Place in Cork city, to coincide with the European Capital of Culture 2005.
- A significant programme of bus priority measures has been developed by the Quality Bus Network Office (QBN) and funding is in place. Cork has developed a programme of Green Routes while Galway, Limerick and Waterford have been invited to come forward with additional QBC proposals to tackle congestion.

New services will be introduced both to some new housing developments and to existing poorly served communities.

And,

We will ensure that access to public transport is one of the criteria taken into consideration by the planning process.

- Each of the eight Regional Authorities are translating the NSS into Regional Planning Guidelines for their respective regions. The Department of Transport has participated in the preparation of

each of these guidelines to ensure due recognition is given to the importance of public transport in planning future needs of these regions.

- The Department is also participating in various regional transport studies - Cork Area Strategic Plan and similar studies in Galway and Limerick. In the case of Dublin, the Dublin Transportation Office is now examining all major planning applications in the GDA and reviewing them from a transport perspective and commenting to ensure that at planning stage the transport implications of the project are adequately addressed and the outcome of the planning process are consistent with overall transport plans for the region, as contained in the DTO "Platform for Change".
- In the case of Dublin, the Regional Planning Guidelines are specifically designed to consolidate development in the region and achieve high densities which public transport can support.

Railways

We will complete the first rail safety programme and initiate a new five year programme beginning in 2004.

- The Railway Safety Programme 1999-2003 was completed at the end of 2003.
- In excess of €60m was invested in the infrastructure and safety management systems of Iarnród Éireann over the 5 years of the programme.
- The work of the High Level Task Force on Railway Safety, on developing recommendations to Government for a new five- year programme beginning in 2004, is nearing completion.
- An interim railway safety investment programme has been in place since the beginning of 2004, pending the recommendations of the Task Force.

An independent Railway Safety Authority will be established.

- The Dail Committee stage of the Railway Safety Bill was completed on 7 May 2003.
- The progress of the Bill has been delayed by the drafting of extensive new provisions creating offences by persons working on railways, primarily due to intoxication.
- The Railway Safety Commission, Railway Incident Investigation Unit and Railway Safety Advisory Council will be established following the enactment of the Railway Safety Bill.
- It is our aim to have the Bill enacted by the end of 2004.
- An interim Railway Safety Commission has been operating in advance of the enactment of the Bill.

We will establish Iarnród Éireann as an independent state company in its own right with full management autonomy.

- The Minister for Transport announced his proposals for regulatory reform of public transport and the restructuring of CIE to the Public Transport Partnership Forum on 7 November, 2002.
- Since then he has been engaged in ongoing dialogue with the various stakeholders in relation to the proposals with the objective of seeking an agreed approach to the reform programme.

A strategic rail review will provide a blueprint for the future development of the railways in Ireland and we will introduce new regional and commuter routes.

- The Strategic Rail Review has been completed and was published by the Minister in April 2003.

The DART and outer suburban lines will be upgraded.

- Work has begun on the DART upgrade project including the purchase of 40 additional carriages which, when completed in 2005, will double the capacity of the DART system since 2000.
- Capacity on the outer suburban rail network has significantly increased since late 2003 when 80 new railcars were brought into service.

Improvements to mainline rail services and rolling stock will continue.

- 67 mainline railway carriages are currently being manufactured for delivery in 2005. They are expected to enter service in late 2005/early 2006. The Heuston Station project was completed in late 2003.

Dublin Light Rail (Luas) will be introduced between Tallaght and Connolly Station and between Sandyford and St. Stephen's Green.

- Passenger services on the Sandyford line commenced on 30th June 2004 and are due to commence on the Tallaght line at the end of August 2004.

We will develop the metro for Dublin on a PPP basis making the maximum use of private finance and achieving a link to Dublin Airport by 2007.

- A revised Outline Business Case (OBC) for Phase 1 of the Dublin Metro which includes a link from the City Centre to Dublin Airport has been received from the Railway Procurement Agency (RPA).
- The RPA is currently providing additional information to support the OBC. The estimated costs in the original Outline Business Case were substantial and the RPA were asked for a number of additional aspects of the proposals to be further examined. This included the cost of the project and its potential impact on the General Government Balance and the legal, planning and technical considerations based on practice elsewhere, particularly Madrid where the authorities have developed a strong international reputation for the speedy completion of the metro extensions at relatively low cost.
- Twenty-two expressions of interest have been received from national and international companies.
- The Minister for Transport will shortly finalise proposals on the Metro in the context of the wider transport needs of the Greater Dublin Area and he intends to bring his recommendations to the Government shortly.

We will fully support the independent Railway Procurement Agency.

- Legislation to establish the Railway Procurement Agency has now been enacted and its principal achievement is the delivery of Luas in 2004.
- The Agency also has responsibility for delivering "Integrated Ticketing" in Dublin. To date one private operator is now operating a "smart card" ticketing system in co-operation with the RPA.
- The RPA is also developing the Metro project for Dublin.

Roads

We will fully implement the National Roads Programme provided for in the National Development Plan.

- Good progress is being made in the implementation of the national roads development programme provided for in the NDP.
- Exchequer investment in the programme over the period 2000-2004 will amount to approx €5.05 billion. Under an agreed five year rolling multi-annual budget, State investment of almost €7 billion is guaranteed together with up to €1 billion from private sources in Public Private Partnerships. The completion of motorways to the South and the West have been prioritised to complement the recently completed M1 to Dundalk.
- New contractual arrangements and increased efficiencies in the construction industry are delivering projects faster and within budget.
- 37 projects have been completed over the period 2000-2003. 34 projects are under Construction or at Tender Stage and 8 projects will open to traffic this year.
- We are committed to maintaining investment at a high level in the upgrading of the national roads network, and a multi-annual financial envelope (totalling up to €8 billion) is available in the period 2004-2008.

We will continue with the programme of investment in non-national roads up to 2005 and we will follow this with a further significant investment programme.

- In 2004 the total allocation for non-national roads is €476.8 million – this is the highest ever level of State funding for these roads. It is more than double the 1997 allocation and represents an increase of almost 10% on the 2003 initial allocation, which was in itself a record level of funding.
- €12 million has been allocated for the Local Improvement Scheme in 2004 – this represents an increase of 10% on the 2003 allocation.
- Consultants were appointed in 2003 to carry out a Pavement Condition Study on regional and local roads, together with a review of Pavement Management Systems. This new study is part of the Government's ongoing commitment to restore the network of regional and local roads to a satisfactory condition. The results of the study, which should be available in the Autumn, will form an important part in prioritising investment in the non-national road network and ensuring value for money in future years.

We will put in place a new 5 year plan to ensure that non-national roads are properly signposted.

- € million is being provided in 2004 for the continuation of the Regional Road Signposting Programme which began in 2003.

Cycle Network and Facilities

We will invest in expanding the national network of cycleways in order to encourage more people to cycle and to promote cycling as a safe and healthy mode of transport.

- Provision of cycle ways and cycle parking in any area is a matter for the local authority in the first instance.
- Government assistance is available to local authorities in the Greater Dublin Area for the provision of facilities for cyclists through traffic management grant funding administered by the DTO.

- Approximately €1.1m is being made available this year to cycle-related projects in the Greater Dublin Area.
- Currently well over 220 kilometres (2 way) of cycle routes have been completed in the Dublin region.
- 2,750 cycle parking spaces have also been provided
- The DTO is currently working on a cycle policy document and four-year plan and 2nd cycle manual, which will give design guidance on the appropriate facilities for appropriate environments, for example segregated cycle tracks.

We will allocate a portion of the budget on road improvement projects to the provision of new footpaths to allow pedestrians to walk in greater safety and comfort.

- The total 2004 Discretionary Improvement Grant allocation to County Councils is €22 million – an increase of over 5% on the 2003 allocation. The total 2004 Block Grant allocation to City, Borough and Town Councils is almost €14 million – an increase of 8.6% on the 2003 allocation. Local authorities may carry out a wide range of improvement works under these grants, including the provision and improvement of footpaths and pedestrian facilities. The urban authorities also receive a Special Block Grant for Footpath/Carriageway Restoration which must be used for restoration works on carriageways and footpaths - €15 million has been provided in 2004 – an increase of over 10% on the 2003 allocation.
- In 2004, a sum of over €2 million has been allocated to Cork, Galway, Limerick and Waterford City Councils under the Regional Traffic Management Scheme. This funding can be used for various works including the provision and improvement of pedestrian facilities.

Rural Transport

We will continue to support the Rural Transport Initiative which will run until end 2003.

- The NDP provided €4.4 million for this scheme. However, some €6 million was provided for the Rural Transport Initiative (RTI) in the two-year period to end in 2003 when the initiative was originally due to conclude. A further €3 million is being provided for the RTI this year to allow for a full roll out of the services and to facilitate an appraisal of the initiative.
- The Free Travel Scheme of the Department of Social and Family Affairs was extended to the RTI in July 2003.

On completion of the current RTI programme, we will develop in conjunction with the Rural Transport Sub-Committee of the Public Transport Partnership Forum a new programme to further promote and support the development of innovative, community based public transport projects.

- ADM has commissioned a full appraisal of the initiative. Among other things, the purpose of the appraisal is to measure the effectiveness of the RTI in addressing the transport needs of rural Ireland and in providing value for money. The appraisal is due to be finalised later this year and account will be taken of its findings in considering the future of the initiative.

We will ensure that every county has a comprehensive rural transport initiative in place.

- The RTI is currently operational in all counties, with the exception of Louth from where there was no application.

We will embark on a new initiative to further develop localised bus services, particularly in rural areas.

- The RTI provides funding on a pilot basis for voluntary and community organisations and community partnerships to address the particular transport need of their rural areas by actively engaging in the provision of transport services.

Traffic Corps

We will establish a dedicated Traffic Corps

- A detailed consultation process involving the Departments of Transport, Justice, Equality and Law Reform and the Garda Síochána is being progressed.
- The Department of Transport is also examining the position internationally in order to establish the practice in other EU States.

Taxis

We will work in a fair and equitable way to ensure taxi supply matches demand.

and,

We will continue the process of making taxis wheelchair accessible.

and,

We will implement the recommendations of the Taxi Hardship Panel.

and,

We will appoint a national regulator for the future regulation of licensing, standards and the quality of service.

- On 19 November 2002, the Government approved proposals for the establishment of an Office of National Taxi Regulator and a Taxi Advisory Council, initially on a non-statutory basis, pending the development of legislative proposals.
- On 17 December 2002, the Government approved the implementation on a phased basis of the recommendations of the Taxi Hardship Panel by the National Taxi Regulator.
- An interim Chairman of the Commission for Taxi Regulation was appointed in February 2003 to undertake a series of detailed consultations with those involved in the taxi, hackney and limousine industry, local authorities, An Garda Síochána and other relevant groups.
- The Taxi Regulation Act 2003 was enacted in July 2003 to provide the legislative basis for the establishment of the Commission for Taxi Regulation and Advisory Council to the Commission for Taxi Regulation. The Act also facilitates the replacement of the current regulatory system applying to the licensing and operation of small public service vehicles (taxis, hackneys and limousines) and their drivers, and the development, under the auspices of the Commission for Taxi Regulation, of new qualitative standards relating to the operation and driving of small public service vehicles.
- In recognition of Government policy to continue the process of making taxis wheelchair accessible, a specific objective of the Commission is to promote access to small public service vehicles by persons with disabilities. The Commission will also determine the manner and timeframe for the implementation of the standards for accessible taxi services.

- The National Taxi Regulator was appointed in July 2004. He will be the Chairman of the Independent Commission for Taxi Regulation. He will formally take up office in September 2004 when the Commission will also be established on a full statutory basis.
- The Advisory Council to the Commission for Taxi Regulation was established with effect from 4 November 2003 to advise the Commission for Taxi Regulation and the Minister for Transport, as appropriate, in relation to issues relevant to small public service vehicles and their drivers.
- Area Development Management Limited was engaged to administer and manage the Taxi Hardship Payments Scheme, which is implementing the recommendations of the Taxi Hardship Panel Report. Hardship payments commenced in December 2003 and payments totalling €8.02m had been made to 663 qualifying persons under the Scheme to 7 May 2004.
- Customer complaints about taxi industry are being addressed. All taxis and hackneys are now required to provide on request printed receipts to customers.

Aviation

We will support the agreed Aer Lingus survival plan.

- The Aer Lingus Survival Plan has been fully implemented and the Company has returned to profitability one year ahead of target.

Low cost travel is the fastest growing sector in the aviation industry. We will ensure that all our State airports will cater for the requirements of this sector.

- Traffic at Dublin Airport reached 15 million passengers in 2003, up 5% on the previous year. Plans for additional infrastructural capacity, both airside and landside, to cater for forecast growth to 30 million passengers by 2020 are currently being addressed.
- With the completion of its new terminal extension in 2000, Shannon has sufficient capacity to cater for growth for the foreseeable future.
- A major new infrastructural investment project costing €140m is currently underway at Cork Airport including a new terminal building and multi-storey car-park.

We will ensure that a low cost facility is built at Pier D in Dublin Airport without delay.

- Aer Rianta have secured planning approval for a new Pier facility (Pier D) at Dublin Airport.
- The Minister has sought the views of the Board-designate for the new Dublin Airport Authority both in relation to Aer Rianta's Pier D proposal and the independent terminal concept.

We will examine proposals for a new independent terminal at Dublin Airport and progress them if the evidence suggests that such a terminal will deliver significant benefits.

- Expressions of interest in providing an independent terminal were received from 13 national and international companies. The expressions were assessed by a Panel of Experts which concluded that an independent terminal is a viable option for the development of Dublin Airport and would elicit considerable market interest.
- We expect to bring proposals to Government in the near future.

We will support the development of new air passenger services at all airports.

- It is the policy of the Department of Transport to encourage the development of new air passenger services at all airports.

We will continue to transform Aer Rianta and as part of this process we will ensure that Shannon and Cork Airports have greater autonomy and independence

- The Government decided in July last to proceed with arrangements to establish Shannon, Cork and Dublin Airports as fully independent and autonomous authorities under State ownership.
- The Minister has announced the Boards-designate for the new Dublin and Shannon Airport Authorities and the Minister will appoint the remaining members of the new Cork Airport Authority shortly. The Minister has published the Bill to give effect to the restructuring of Aer Rianta and it is the intention to have the legislation enacted in summer 2004.

The NDP capital development support for regional airports will be fully implemented. A new three year Public Service Obligation air service programme to regional airports will be launched this year.

- Grant-aid of approximately €9 million has been paid out to the six regional airports since the start of the NDP, Further NDP allocations will be considered shortly.
- A renewed three-year PSO air services programme to the regional airports was launched in 2002 in accordance with the Programme for Government and regular PSO air services are now operating to the regional airports.
- Following a recent review of the PSO air service programme, the Minister will consider proposals later this year to ensure that, in the long term, an appropriate level of air access to the regions can be delivered on the most cost-effective basis.

We will address the key issues required to make Ireland an international hub for airfreight.

- The Minister has discussed this issue in a preliminary way with the Irish Association of International Express Carriers, which represents the main international air freight operators including DHL, UPS, Federal Express and TNT.

THE ENVIRONMENT

We are committed to implementing an ambitious environmental programme.

Air Quality

We will implement an upgraded air quality monitoring system, including “real-time” reporting.

- The EPA is the designated competent body for air quality monitoring at national level.
- The Air Quality Standards Regulations 2002 require the dissemination of public information on ambient air quality on a real-time basis. In this regard, the EPA’s new air quality website, which enables the public to log on and check air quality at a number of monitoring points nationally, was officially launched in January 2004.

We will extend the ban on smoky coal to additional centres.

- Regulations extending the ban on the marketing, sale and distribution of bituminous coal to Bray, Kilkenny, Sligo and Tralee were made in March 2003 and came into force on 1st October 2003.

The current negotiated agreement with the Solid Fuel Trade Group (which is working well) will be reviewed by end 2004 before negotiations begin for the post 2005 period.

We will prepare and implement a comprehensive strategy to deal with emissions of critical air pollutants.

- Following public consultation last year, a national strategy to reduce national emissions as required by the EU National Emissions Ceilings (NEC) Directive and the UNECE “Gothenburg” Protocol will be brought to Government for approval later this year.
- A draft National Emission Reduction Plan for existing power plants was submitted to the European Commission in November 2003; subject to approval, this will achieve significant SO₂ and NO_x emissions reductions as a contribution to the NECs Strategy.

Water Quality

We will ensure that discharges of untreated sewage from our big cities and towns into the sea cease by end 2003.

- All discharges of untreated sewage from our big cities has ceased, with the exception of Waterford, where work is underway.
- Projects providing for secondary treatment or better in most of our major cities and towns have been completed or are at an advanced stage of construction.
- The remaining six projects, Howth, Waterford City, Tramore, Shanganagh, Bray and Bundoran, are all approved for construction in the Water Services Investment Programme 2004–2006 and are being advanced towards construction as a matter of priority.
- A number of large PPP projects currently under way will greatly facilitate the achievement of this objective.
- Construction of the Ringsend Wastewater Treatment Plant is now completed and commissioning is almost finalised. Construction of the Cork Main Drainage scheme is well underway and is being commissioned at present. Limerick Main Drainage Construction was commissioned in late 2003. Similarly, Wexford Main Drainage Scheme is also now operational.
- Other coastal towns where similar PPP projects are at various stages of procurement including Arklow, Waterford, Dungarvan Balbriggan/Skerries, Donegal, Tramore, Rosslare, Wicklow and Sligo.

We will ensure that we meet the requirements of the Urban Waste Water Directive in relation to treatment of sewage. In addition, we will provide, or be at an advanced stage of planning, wastewater treatment facilities for all population centres over 1,000 by 2005.

- The Water Services Investment Programme 2004–2006 incorporates all the remaining wastewater schemes needed to comply with the treatment standards for urban areas under the EU Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive.
- Compliance with Directive deadlines is a central objective in the advancement of these schemes.
- There are 109 agglomerations with a population equivalent greater than 1,000 which are not encompassed by the EU Urban Wastewater Directive, either because of their size or the fact that they do not discharge into freshwaters or estuaries.
- Of these 109 agglomerations, 62 already have secondary treatment facilities and the remaining 47 are provided for, under Water Services Investment Programme 2004–2006.

- Work is ongoing on a National Waste Water Study which involves collection and analysis of data on 180 urban drainage schemes serving population equivalents of 2000 or more.
- The Study will review existing infrastructure, outline deficiencies, identify policies and strategies for developing sustainable drainage systems in the various collection areas and outline recommendations for upgrading, together with cost estimates for same.
- All local authorities have concluded Sludge Management Plans to manage the increasing volumes of sewage sludge arising as a consequence of the major investment in waste water treatment facilities under the NDP.
- These plans set out proposals for the management of water and waste water sludge in a progressive and environmentally sustainable way.

We will ensure that the water quality threats posed by phosphates and nitrates are tackled.

- Measures are being actively pursued in the context of ongoing substantial investment in waste water treatment facilities, implementation of the Water Framework Directive and the development of proposals to strengthen the application of good farming practice for environmental protection.
- A draft Nitrates Action Programme issued for public consultation in December 2003 and, following further consultation with the farming sector, a further draft has now been issued. It is intended to finalise the Programme shortly.

We will fully implement the Water Framework Directive.

- Implementation is being actively pursued across a wide range of activities. The Directive was transposed into Irish law by Regulations made in December 2003.
- Four major projects on river basin management (South-East region, Shannon, Eastern region and Western region) have commenced and other projects are being developed.
- A joint North-South project for implementation of the Directive in relation to shared waters is being brought forward.
- The Government's Water Services Pricing Policy Framework reflects the requirements of Article 9 of the Directive on recovery of costs for water services. The policy framework, adopted by the Government in Autumn 1998, requires:
 - the recovery of average operational and marginal capital costs of water services from all non-domestic users;
 - the completion of the metering of all such users by 2006;
 - the maintenance of the status quo on not charging for domestic water services, and
 - the meeting of these costs through the Local Government Fund in the case of operational costs and through the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government's capital programme in the case of infrastructural costs.
- Comprehensive guidance on implementation of the water services pricing policy has been commissioned and disseminated to local authorities.

We will significantly increase the number of blue flags and bring designated bathing places up to required EU standards.

- Ongoing substantial investment in waste water treatment facilities will secure improved water quality in coastal areas.

- A specific project is being pursued to identify options for increasing the numbers and scope of seaside awards.

We will ensure that group water schemes meet the quality requirements of the EU Drinking Water Directive.

- Installation of water treatment and disinfection facilities is required in some 500 privately sourced group water schemes in order to achieve compliance with the Drinking Water Regulations.
- The annual allocations to local authorities for 2004 under the Rural Water Programme provide for the advancement this year of projects to improve the water supplies to 38,000 of the 50,000 householders affected.
- The requirements of the remaining 12,000 households will be accommodated as early as possible under future rounds of the Programme.

We will introduce a new Water Services Bill to modernise the outdated legislation in this area.

- The Water Services Bill was published on 16 December, 2003 and passed all stages in the Seanad on 1 July and will be considered by the Dail in the Autumn.
- The Water Services Bill 2003 will consolidate water services legislation into a single modern code, and strengthen administrative arrangements for planning the delivery of water services at both local and national level. The Bill will also introduce a licensing system to regulate the operations of the group water scheme sector. It is anticipated that the new supervision arrangements will provide a reliable mechanism to improve performance generally, and to ensure that drinking water quality standards are complied with.

Waste

We will ensure that local authority waste management plans, guided by the waste hierarchy of prevention, minimisation, reuse, recycle, recovery and safe disposal, are fully and speedily implemented.

- All local authorities have adopted waste management plans.
- To assist with implementation of the plans, we launched a waste management grants scheme in 2002 in order to provide funding for the provision of waste recycling and recovery infrastructure. Three rounds of allocations, totalling some €47m, have been made to date.
- Our policy statement “Waste Management: Taking Stock and Moving Forward” published in April 2004 highlights the progress made in relation to recycling, thermal treatment and landfill facilities and sets out a range of “Key Actions” to drive the process of waste management plan implementation in the months and years ahead.

We will intensify our waste prevention efforts through an ambitious and well-resourced National Waste Prevention Programme.

- We launched a National Waste Prevention Programme in April 2004; start-up funding of €2m has been provided for the establishment of the Programme which is being led by a Core Prevention Team within the Environmental Protection Agency. A National Waste Prevention Committee to guide and oversee the Programme has also been established.

We believe that Mass Burn Incineration of unsegregated waste, with no energy recovery, is not an acceptable practice today.

And,

Thermal treatment, using best available technology, must be based on prior extraction from the waste stream of recyclables and problematic materials (e.g. metals, batteries) to the maximum extent possible, and on ensuring the highest regulatory standards through the EPA licensing system.

- Our policy, which is set out in the policy documents “Changing Our Ways”, “Delivering Change – Preventing and Recycling Waste” and “Taking Stock and Moving Forward”, is based on the internationally recognised waste hierarchy of prevention, minimisation, re-use/recycling, energy recovery and, finally, the environmentally safe disposal of residual waste in landfill.
- Local authority waste management plans comply with Government policy and, correspondingly, call for the provision of an integrated suite of modern waste facilities. In addition, the plans envisage the provision of segregated collection services in urban areas and require the incorporation of energy recovery, either in terms of electricity or district heating, as part of thermal treatment projects.
- The procurement of a waste-to-energy facility for the Dublin region has advanced significantly – “invitation to tender” documents have issued to the shortlisted tenderers and the deadline for the submission of bids has now passed. It is envisaged that a contract for the project will be signed by end 2004. We are supporting the work of the South East and the Midlands regions in procuring waste-to-energy facilities for their areas.
- The private sector has responded to the comprehensive regulatory and waste management planning regime now in place and have secured planning permission for two thermal treatment facilities in Meath and Cork.
- Regulations were made in mid-2003 to transpose the stringent requirements of the EU Directive on Incineration into national law. Effect is given to the requirements of the Directive in the context of the operation, by the EPA, of its waste licensing functions.
- The *Protection of the Environment Act 2003* provided for a change in the technical basis of EPA licensing from BATNEEC (Best Available Technology Not Entailing Excessive Cost) to BAT (Best Available Techniques).

In terms of recycling, we will progressively extend door-to-door collections of recyclables to most remaining urban centres. The recycling effort will be assisted by the in-built incentive of weight-based charging and the banning of certain types of waste from landfill. We will also make recycling easier by doubling the number of Civic Amenity Sites and by significantly improving the availability of “bring banks”, coupled with new standards to ensure that all bring banks are managed properly and operated clearly. We will support community recycling activities.

- “Waste Management – Taking Stock and Moving Forward” published in April 2004 sets out the progress made in relation to recycling. In particular, it showed that between 1998 and 2003,
 - the number of bring banks doubled to almost 1,700;
 - the number of Civic Amenity Sites almost doubled, now standing at 55 facilities with 6 more at an advanced stage of construction; and
 - the number of households provided with a service for the segregated collection of dry recyclables soared from about 70,000 to over 560,000. In addition, over 50,000 of these households also have access to a service for the segregated collection of organic waste.
- In April 2004, we allocated a further €25m towards the development of additional recycling infrastructure, bringing to €47m the total funding provided for this purpose since November 2002. This will support the development of bring banks and civic amenity sites, and the expansion of material recovery and composting plants, facilitating increased collection and recovery of recyclable materials.

- The Waste Management (Packaging) Regulations 2003 - effective from 1st March 2003 - require all manufacturing and retail businesses participating in placing packaging on the market to segregate the packaging waste arising on their own premises into specified waste streams (i.e. waste aluminium, fibreboard, glass, paper, plastic sheeting, steel and wood) and to have it collected by authorised operators for recycling. The Regulations also provide that this "specified" waste may no longer be landfilled.
- We published a draft National Strategy on Biodegradable Waste in April 2004.
- We have established a Market Development Group, supported by €1m in start-up funding, to drive a Market Development Programme for recyclable materials.
- Major progress has been made in moving to pay by weight/volume waste charging systems and we have set 1 January 2005 as the date for the completion of the changeover.
- Funding from the Environment Fund for community recycling initiatives is being considered.

At industry level, we will extend the producer responsibility initiative in the area of packaging waste to the areas of construction and demolition waste, end-of-life vehicles, tyres, newsprint, electronic equipment and batteries. We will strive to ensure that these initiatives can be implemented on an agreed voluntary basis. However, failing agreement, we will regulate to achieve the desired recovery and recycling objectives.

- The two existing producer responsibility initiatives in respect of packaging waste and farm plastics waste were added to in June 2002 with the establishment of the National Construction and Demolition Waste Council (NCDWC). This council, involving representation from all sectors of the industry, is tasked with significantly increasing the recycling of construction and demolition waste which, in 2001, reached over 65%, exceeding the 50% target for 2003 and representing major progress towards the 85% recovery target for 2013. The Council will shortly be commencing a Voluntary Industry Initiative aimed at substantially increasing the level of C&D recycling.
- Further producer responsibility initiatives are being developed in respect of end-of-life vehicles (to be introduced in 2005), electrical and electronic equipment waste (we have published a Task Force report on the implementation of the relevant EU Directive; the free take back of this waste will commence in 2005), newsprint (to be introduced by end 2004) and tyres (to be introduced by end-2004). As progress on these initiatives materialises, consideration will be given to developing similar initiatives in relation to certain additional waste streams, such as phone directories and batteries.

In terms of dealing with residual waste, we will ensure that we dramatically cut the volumes of waste going into landfill.

- The waste grants scheme is providing funding for waste infrastructure to facilitate the achievement of targets of a diversion of 50% of overall household waste away from landfill and a minimum 65% reduction in biodegradable wastes consigned to landfill over a 15 year timescale.
- New Packaging Regulations came into effect on 1st March 2003, placing a requirement on producers to segregate specified packaging waste arising on commercial premises for recycling.
- The progress being made on reducing the volume of waste going to landfill will be measured in the National Waste Database Reports published by the EPA. In advance of the report for 2004 coming available, "Taking Stock and Moving Forward" highlighted notable developments in recycling, as measured by a number of leading indicators. For example, data from local authorities indicates that the volumes of waste accepted at their bring banks and Civic Amenity Sites in 2003 were up 25% on 2002. In addition, Dublin City Council reported 20% recycling of household waste in 2003, compared to a national average of 5.6% in 2001.

We will develop further the concept of community gain in association with the delivery of major infrastructure proposals under the local authority waste management plans.

- It has become standard practice for the community gain concept to be given practical effect through the inclusion of an appropriate condition in the granting of planning permission for major pieces of waste infrastructure.

We will establish a National Waste Management Advisory Board to co-ordinate, monitor, review and advise on all aspects of waste management policy. We will also establish a Recycling Forum as well as a Market Development Group to examine the issues around developing markets for recycled materials.

- We have established a Market Development Group to lead a Market Development Programme for recyclable materials. A Recycling Forum will be established by end-2004.
- The establishment of a separate National Waste Management Board has been deferred, as it is considered that present requirements will be better served by direct political leadership of the process of implementing waste management plans.

Litter

We will fully implement the new National Litter Pollution Monitoring System and the wide range of measures in our Litter Action Plan.

- The National Litter Pollution Monitoring System has been developed; almost all local authorities have begun system implementation in their area – progress is being regularly monitored.
- We are also monitoring progress on the implementation of the wide range of actions in the Litter Action Plan.
- The enhanced anti-litter provisions, including increased fines for litter offences, as set out in the *Protection of the Environment Act 2000*, came into effect on 1 October 2003.

We will use resources from the Environment Fund to make further progress on raising litter awareness and increasing enforcement.

- The Litter Budget 2004 is being funded by the Environment Fund; this will enable us to continue progress on a range of national measures to support local authority action against litter.

We will ensure that all government and other state agencies fulfill their obligations under the Litter Pollution Act.

- All Government Departments and the main State agencies have been requested to outline their proposals to discharge their duties under the 1997 Act.

Climate Change

We will fully implement the National Climate Change Strategy and we will report on progress on an annual basis.

- The first progress report on implementation of the National Climate Change Strategy was published in May 2002, in conjunction with Ireland's ratification of the Kyoto Protocol.
- A review of implementation of Strategy, due for publication in 2004, will incorporate a further progress report.

- The ESRI was appointed to carry out a National Survey of Housing Quality to assess condition of the national housing stock.
- The survey contains a strong focus on energy and energy conservation, and the final draft report is currently being considered.
- The National Allocation Plan, 2005-2007, for purposes of the EU Emissions Trading Scheme, was submitted to the European Commission by the deadline date of 31 March 2004, and recently approved, and arrangements for implementation of the relevant EU legislation are well advanced. Installations included in the trading scheme represent approximately one-third of Irish greenhouse gas emissions.

We will implement our greenhouse gas taxation policies on a phased incremental basis and in a manner which takes account of national economic, social and environmental objectives.

- In Budget 2003, the Minister for Finance requested all relevant Government Departments to advance plans for a general carbon energy tax, with a view to introduction.
- In line with the commitment to undertake full consultation with interested parties before the introduction of the tax, a consultation paper was issued by the Department of Finance during 2003. The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government is participating in ongoing discussions in the Green Tax Group, including on the outcome of the consultation.

We will implement a major communications programme to heighten awareness of the challenges we face in climate change, the measures we must implement and the benefits that will flow from them.

- Following recommendations received from Comhar on communicating the National Climate Change Strategy, climate change awareness has been incorporated into our environmental information and awareness campaign.

Funding/Eco Taxes

In providing funding to local authorities, we will earmark specific funds which will be available to local authorities for the achievement of defined environmental targets.

- The bulk of the Environment Fund – up to €55million in 2003 – is provided to local authorities for investment in environmental protection projects.
- Since November 2002, €2million from the Fund has been allocated to 71 local authority recycling projects such as “bring banks”, civic amenity sites, transfer stations facilitating recovery activities, materials recovery facilities for dry recyclables, and biological treatment facilities for green and organic household waste.

We will consider the extension of the levy on plastic bags to other areas such as non-reusable packaging.

- The extension of the environmental levy on plastic bags to other materials which are problematic from a litter and waste perspective is currently being considered.

We will rebalance the VRT and motor tax regimes to favour vehicles with lower carbon dioxide emissions.

- As provided for in the National Climate Change Strategy, a rebalancing of the motor tax regime to favour vehicles with lower CO₂ emissions and greater fuel-efficiency is under active consideration.

We will improve the tax incentives for investment in renewable energy in order to reduce our dependence on CO₂-emitting fossil fuels.

- Budget 2003 was the first budget to contain a concrete commitment to full consideration of the introduction of carbon taxation.
- The introduction of a carbon energy tax in 2005, together with other initiatives to encourage renewable energy will provide for a cleaner environment.

Enforcement

We will establish a new Office of Environmental Enforcement to audit the performance of local authorities in discharging their environmental enforcement function, taking action against those lagging behind. The Office will also monitor compliance by public authorities with their environmental obligations. Where significant breaches of environmental legislation occur, the Office will be able to prosecute cases or assist local authorities in doing so.

- The Office of Environmental Enforcement (OEE) was launched on 22 October 2003, as a distinct and dedicated unit of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and has been operational since that date.
- The OEE is being funded in 2004 from the general provision for the EPA of €14.405 million announced in the Revised Estimates Volume published on 26 February 2004, from income associated with relevant EPA licensing activities and the sum of €2.5 million in additional funding from the Environment Fund.
- To further improve environmental standards, the provisions in the *Protection of the Environment Act 2003* which strengthen the integrated licensing system operated by the EPA since 1994 and bring that system fully into line with Directive 96/61 EC on Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control (IPPC), have recently been brought into force.

We will ensure that penalties for breaches of environmental legislation should reflect the damage to the environment that has been caused. We will also explore the possibility of introducing the Supplemental Environment Project under which fines could be reduced in exchange of a binding commitment to carry out an environmentally beneficial project.

- Increased fines for offences under the IPPC and waste licensing systems, as set out in the *Protection of the Environment Act 2003*, came into operation on 22 October 2003.
- The possible introduction of the Supplemental Environment Project is under consideration.

Partnership

We will continue to successfully operate Comhar – National Sustainable Development Partnership as a forum of excellence in terms of discussion and debate on key environmental issues. We will also develop the approach to direct funding for environmental NGOs.

- Comhar continues to participate in the discussion and debate on key environmental issues.
- Capacity building funding has been provided to an umbrella group of nationally-based environmental NGOs, for the development of secretariat and for distribution among member organisations.

Nuclear Safety

We regard the continued existence of Sellafield as an unacceptable threat to Ireland and that it should be closed.

- Our position is made clear regularly through responses to public consultations on nuclear matters and regular contacts at all levels, and in correspondence with UK authorities.

We will use every diplomatic and legal route available to us to work towards the achievement of this objective.

- We are pursuing separate legal actions against the Sellafield MOX plant through the OSPAR Convention and the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS); and through participation at EU and other international bodies where our position is stated at all times individually and with like-minded countries.

We will continue to be a leading opponent in all international bodies of attempts to foist nuclear energy on developing countries.

- We joined other like-minded countries in a Declaration on this matter at World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002 and will use other opportunities as they arise.

We will keep up-to-date nuclear emergency plans, including sufficient stocks of medical supplies, so as to minimise harm to public health from the effects of any possible exposure to radiation in Ireland.

- The Emergency Plan for Nuclear Accidents is under constant evaluation and updating.

HOUSING

We will implement a multi-stranded approach to addressing housing needs right across the spectrum.

- This is our overarching commitment in relation to housing policy. Addressing the broad range of housing needs requires a multi-stranded approach, which includes:-

- maintaining a high level of supply of housing, through investment in servicing of land, and efficient use of that land through higher residential guidelines;
- bringing forward legislation to reform and modernise the private rented sector; and
- funding a range of targeted measures to assist low income households and those with social housing or special housing needs.

- Since 1997, over 356,000 houses have been built nationally, and the Government remains committed to continuing the increase in housing supply and bringing moderation to the rate of house price increases

We will extend the Serviced Land Initiative, make more efficient use of housing land and make further Special Development Zone designations as required.

- 2003 was the ninth consecutive year of record housing output with 68,819 completions.
- This growth in housing supply was, and is being, facilitated by the continuing investment in serviced land (about 191,000 sites are being provided under the Serviced Land Initiative) and the efficient use of this land as a result of residential density guidelines.

- Progress is being made on the three Strategic Development Zones designated with the Hansfield site in Fingal and the Clonmagadden Valley site in Meath both awaiting decision from An Bord Pleanála. An Bord Pleanála granted permission for the Adamstown SDZ in September 2003. An Implementation Steering Group has been set up to oversee the implementation of this scheme and this Group has met on a number of occasions

We will commit to a further expansion of the various social housing programmes.

- Output for the local authority housing programme in 2003 was 4,972 units, a similar output to 2002 (5,074 units).
- There has also been a significant increase in activity under the affordable housing schemes with 2,522 transactions completed in 2003. Included in this figure were 1,524 units provided under the Affordable Housing Scheme and 998 transactions completed under the Shared Ownership Scheme.
- Two mixed-housing PPP schemes being undertaken by Fingal County Council and Dublin City Council as DBF projects have been completed. Dublin City Council is re-developing its existing schemes at Fatima Mansions and O'Devaney Gardens using the PPP process.

We will assist the voluntary housing sector so that the target of 4,000 accommodation units per annum envisaged under the National Development Plan can be reached.

- In 2003, some 1,617 housing units were provided under the Capital Assistance Scheme and the Capital Loan and Subsidy Scheme.
- This was a record level of output and represented an increase of 19% on the 2002 figure.
- In addition, work was in progress on a further 2,200 units of accommodation at the end of 2003 and there were a further 6,500 units at various stages in the pipeline at local level throughout the country.
- Expenditure on the voluntary and co-operative housing programme amounted to €11million in 2003, an increase of almost 28% on 2002 when expenditure was €65million.

We will, in line with the National Poverty Strategy, set new housing targets in light of the completion of this year's detailed survey of housing needs.

- Local authorities have been requested to put in place and submit details of five-year action plans covering the full range of their housing programmes to the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government by end May 2004. These plans will ensure that a fully strategic approach is taken by local authorities to meeting housing needs in their areas and will ensure that they avail of the certainty provided by multi-annual expenditure programmes.

We will implement a full package of reforms in rented accommodation sector, arising from the report of the Commission on the Private Rented Sector.

- The Residential Tenancies Bill passed all stages in the Dail on 1st July.
- The Bill provides for the legislative reforms of the private rented sector recommended by the Commission on the Private Rented Residential Sector and accepted by the Government.
- It introduces a significant measure of security of tenure for tenants, specifies minimum obligations applying to landlords and tenants, and provides for the establishment of a Private Residential Tenancies Board. The Board will resolve disputes arising in the sector, operate a system of tenancy registration and provide information and policy advice. The Bill restricts rent to market

level and also contains provisions relating to procedures for the termination of tenancies, including graduated notice periods linked to the duration of the tenancy.

- The Private Residential Tenancies Board has been established under the Residential Tenancies Act.

We will consider the introduction of legislation to regulate the establishment and operation of apartment complex management companies.

- The Law Reform Commission (LRC) set up a Working Group in late 2003 to examine the law in relation to condominiums under its Second Programme for Examination of Certain Branches of the Law with a View to their Reform, 2000 - 2007. This will culminate in the production of a consultation paper and a consultation stage will follow thereafter.

We will ensure that the comprehensive Homelessness Strategies now in place are implemented.

- The Cross Department Team on Homelessness continues to review overall progress on the Homelessness Strategy. Updates of progress are submitted to the Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion on a regular basis.
- Proposed evaluation of homeless strategies will commence in the near future. The National Children's Office is leading a Monitoring Committee that co-ordinates the implementation of the Youth Homelessness Strategy nationally.

We will ensure the implementation of local authority Traveller accommodation programmes.

- These programmes were adopted in 2000 and cover the period 2000 to 2004. Local authorities are now being advised to prepare for a new programme to commence in 2005
- During the period 2000-2003 :-
 - a total of €4 million has been spent on the provision of new and refurbishing existing Traveller specific accommodation. A further €40 million has been allocated in 2004;
 - 1,369 additional Traveller families have been accommodated by or with the assistance of local authorities including families in traveller specific accommodation and standard local authority houses as well as shared ownership and tenant purchase schemes; and
 - the number of families on unauthorised sites has reduced in each of the four of the programmes to-date. Overall the total number on unauthorised sites has reduced by 419 families since the programmes commenced from 1,207 to 788 families.
- A total of 457 new units of Traveller specific accommodation, including temporary and emergency accommodation have been completed during the programmes and a further 326 units were refurbished to the best modern standards.

We will take further steps to streamline the approval procedures for local authority house building projects.

- The existing guidelines to local authorities on procedures to be applied to their housing construction programmes are being reviewed.

Through the local authority system, Housing Advice Services will be provided where information on all the housing options and supports will be available to the public.

- The Housing Forum, which was re-established under *Sustaining Progress*, has agreed a work programme which includes reviewing the effectiveness of housing assistance available and an examination of the adequacy of local authority advisory services. Also, work is ongoing on the development of a new computer system to computerise the housing functions of local authorities, which should improve the citizens interactions with local authorities.

We will finalise the compilation of a National Public Property Register to identify properties in state control suitable for housing projects.

- This register is currently being compiled by the Office of Public Works. As part of the new accrual accounting system, local authorities are required to identify land and property assets for their financial accounts.

We will review procedures for dealing with insubstantial planning appeals.

- An Bord Pleanála has submitted a report in relation to the operation of the appeals system and quality of customer service provided by the Board in response to the Comptroller & Auditor General's Report on the appeals system. We will continue to monitor closely the appeals system and the impact of changes to the procedures made under the Planning and Development Act, 2000.

We will review the operation of the Planning and Development Act to ensure that it is meeting the objectives for which it was enacted with particular reference to social and affordable housing.

- The review was undertaken in 2002 and culminated in the introduction of the *Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2002*.
- The 2002 Act, inter alia, amended Part V of the *Planning and Development Act 2000* and is designed to ensure that the Part V objectives set in relation to the provision of social and affordable housing are met.
- The provisions of the 2002 Act will, inter alia, enable approved voluntary housing bodies, as well as local authorities, to provide such housing more efficiently and effectively.
- A number of information sessions were held on the *Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2002* countrywide in late 2003, which were attended by local authority officials and housing developers/builders. Following on from these, an explanatory circular on implementation issues was issued early this year.

In order to minimise the disruption to supply we will ensure that where planning applications become necessary because of the 2 year withering requirement, set maximum application and appeals timings will apply.

- The two year withering requirement was abolished in the *Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2002*, subject to the payment of a levy on any house completed after the planning permission would have expired.

We will implement a new approach to urban renewal based on the combined use of Compulsory Purchase Orders and Public Private Partnerships.

- The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government has issued a circular to local authorities with a view to advancing a number of pilot projects – with the aim of developing the PPP approach in achieving urban regeneration objectives under the current Urban and Town Renewal Schemes.
- Grant assistance under the Local Authority PPP Fund due to terminate on 31 December, 2004 remains available to assist local authorities in developing suitable PPP proposals for projects located in integrated area/town renewal plan areas. Feasibility Studies are underway in relation to Killarney, Tralee, Bray, Dun Laoghaire and Carrick on Shannon.

AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

We believe that a strong agriculture sector is a vital part of a strong Irish economy and the cornerstone of a vibrant rural community. Our aim is the continued enhancement of agriculture and our vision is for rural communities where young people have a choice between attractive options. We are also firmly committed to radically developing the social and physical infrastructure of rural Ireland.

We will maintain the Government and diplomatic offensive to improve world access and the opening of markets.

- We are continuing with the top-level campaign to improve and expand world market access involving representatives of IBEC, IMA, Bord Bia, Department of Foreign Affairs and the Department of Agriculture and Food.
- In relation to beef, the initiative to regain international access has been very successful. All restrictions on trade with Russia have been removed and the Egyptian market has been opened to Irish Beef. Efforts are continuing in relation to the Gulf States.

**We will broaden the scope of agricultural education, anticipating that in some cases, farming may be combined with other occupations
and,**

We will ensure that courses are delivered in a flexible manner suited to potential participants involving increased use of approaches such as night courses and distance learning.

- Teagasc has operated distance-learning programmes on a pilot basis during the past year and a pilot e-learning programme is now being undertaken with 80 adults on a 180-hour e-learning programme. Also 16 Vocational Certificate in Agriculture students are being taught part of their programme through e-learning.
- It is planned to establish an E-College in 2004.
- Improved IT has facilitated the provision of 3rd level courses to the Agricultural colleges.

We will provide through Teagasc a dedicated service which will help part-time and transitional farmers use their capabilities and time to better advantage and efficiency and, where necessary, to diversify their income through appropriate training through an Opportunities Programme.

- The Opportunities Programme was re-launched in January 2004 as the 'Planning Post Fischer' Programme and is focused on assisting farmers adjust their farm and family situation post-decoupling. To date a total of 5,812 farm families have participated in the programme.
- Teagasc is now running night and weekend courses to facilitate the work patterns of part-time farmers.
- Teagasc is also running the three year Vocational Certificate in Agriculture programme at times suitable for part-time farmers in 11 counties.
- Over 10,000 adult farmers participate in Teagasc adult farmer training programmes each year with the majority of courses held at night.

We will implement the recommendations of the Advisory Group on the role of Women in Agriculture.

- The recommendations have been implemented or taken into account by the relevant Government Departments or agencies.

We will work to protect the fundamental principles of the CAP in the EU enlargement negotiations. As necessary, we will also support measures such as adequate EU finances, in order to ensure the smooth integration of the agriculture of the application countries of Central and Eastern Europe joining the European Union, while preparing to take advantage of new market opportunities.

- Agreement was reached on the Mid-term Review of CAP on 26 June 2003, which protected farm incomes and safeguarded the gains for Irish agriculture achieved in the Agenda 2000 Agreement whilst modernising the CAP.
- Budgetary provision for the CAP is now in place until 2013 following the decisions of the European Council in October 2002.
- The Government's objective in the negotiations on the WTO is to preserve the benefits to Irish agriculture and rural communities that were achieved under the Agenda 2000 Agreement. While the WTO negotiations in Cancun did not reach a conclusion, the EU position on agriculture continued to reflect the mandate agreed at Council.
- The 10 new Member States joined the EU on 1 May 2004 during the Irish Presidency of the EU, which will create new market opportunities.

We will continue to promote the highest standards of food safety and foster a culture of innovation, quality and excellence in the food industry.

- To ensure that food at all stages in the food chain is produced to the highest possible standards of safety, an extensive monitoring, surveillance and inspection programme is in place.
- Major advances have been made in relation to food labeling including centralisation of enforcement in the Food Safety Authority.
- Targeted marketing and promotion programmes, managed by An Bord Bia, have been of proven success to food exporters, manufacturers of new, convenience and value-added foods and small specialist producers. A new emphasis on building competencies is encouraging firms to think strategically about their development.
- In 2003 the Food Agency Co-operation Council (FACC), which represents the state agencies dealing with the food sector, launched "Market Led New Product Development for the Food and Drinks Industry", a guide to bringing innovative and new food products to market.
- We commissioned a strategic development plan, which was recently published for the Dairy Industry. A series of actions has begun, aimed at advancing the implementation of the recommendations.
- We have placed increased emphasis on the necessity for a more competitive agri-food sector. In this regard, three reports were commissioned:
 - *Productivity of Irish Agriculture - Newman & Matthews (2003)*
 - *Competitiveness of Irish Agriculture - 1998/99 (Boyle, 2002)*
 - *Indicators of Cost Competitiveness-1996/2000 (Thorne, 2004) Not yet published*
- Funding is being provided towards Research and Development in the form of commissioned research from the various research institutions and from Teagasc.
- An Bord Bia and An Bord Glas have been merged.

We will continue to pursue actions through the EU to ensure that the same high standards apply to imported foods as to domestic products.

- Current EU requirements on food imports are that such imports must reach standards equivalent to those in the EU. Vigilance is maintained to ensure that this position is upheld where amendments to regulations are proposed.

We will seek to improve the level of information available to consumers about the origins of the food on sale in this country through initiatives such as the introduction of a distinct green label for Irish food.

- The continued growth in the membership of quality assured schemes is being promoted by Bord Bia.
- The Food Labelling Group's recommendations on labelling are being implemented. The gap in the beef labelling regulations is being addressed by the introduction of country of origin labelling for beef sold in restaurants and catering outlets.

We will encourage the food industry to build long-term relationships in premium export markets with a strong emphasis on growth in value-added products.

and,

We will encourage the Irish beef industry, in particular, to make the development of sustainable EU markets its over-riding priority with the twin objectives of gaining greater stability and closing the gap between Irish and European prices. The key to making this happen is the building of an integrated supply chain through partnership arrangements between producers, processors and retailers, underpinned by the National Beef Assurance Scheme and industry quality schemes in product promotions.

- An Bord Bia is spearheading a drive to achieve increased penetration of the higher value-added EU markets on a longer term basis.
- The value of Irish agri-food and drinks exports to the EU has grown in recent years and amounted to €5,230m or 77% of the total exports in 2003 while exports to third countries amounted to €1,598.6m or 23% of the total.
- Throughout the 1990s, the beef industry exported approximately 50% of its products into non-EU markets. In 2003, this share dropped to just 17% (in volume) while the share to the high priced EU markets has increased proportionately.
- Irish cattle prices are at their highest level for over 3 years and the gap between Irish producer prices and those in the EU are narrowing. In 2000 representative prices for cattle in Ireland were 86% of the EU average. In 2004 this figure had increased to 92%.
- The prepared consumer foods sector has shown remarkable growth in sales and exports in the past decade with estimated total sales of €2.6 billion in 2002. While the volume of exports rose by 4% in 2003 the value fell by 5% to €1.52 billion due to currency changes.

We will promote the preservation of the environment through good farming practice supported by grants and special tax incentives to assist on-farm investment and careful waste management. We will seek to ensure that supports are available to all farmers.

- The new broad based Farm Waste Management Scheme came into force in January 2004. The success of the scheme to date is shown by the fact that applications under the Farm Waste Scheme have increased in the first quarter of 2004 by 75% compared to the same period in 2003. In the case of the Dairy Hygiene Scheme, the increase is over 230%.

- Expenditure on the Farm Waste Management Scheme increased from €0.16m in 2001 to €0.18m in 2003 while the Dairy Hygiene Scheme expenditure amounted to €0.16m in 2001 increasing to €4.66m in 2003.
- The accelerated rate of capital allowances for investment in necessary pollution control facilities has been renewed for a further three years until 31 December 2006.

We will foster a clean and attractive countryside with a high quality of life that can be enjoyed and appreciated by all. As part of this policy we will seek to make the REPS scheme more attractive.

- A new Rural Environment Protection Scheme (REPS) is currently being launched. Under this enhanced Scheme, farmers will receive a average increase of 28% in payments. A provision of €260m has been made in the 2004 Estimates, compared with €90m in 2003. It is anticipated that the new Scheme will encourage increased participation by farmers.

We will enhance cooperation with the Northern Ireland authorities on keeping the island of Ireland disease-free.

- Regular meetings continue to be held at Ministerial and official levels to progress alignment of policies and protection arrangements and to build on the valuable experience gained during the Foot and Mouth crisis of 2001.

We will enhance the contribution of horticulture, by supporting the production of product in an environmentally friendly manner and marketed to uniformly high standards.

- The amalgamation of An Bord Bia and An Bord Glas will greatly facilitate this aim.
- The Quality Programme has been extended to all sectors, both food and non-food. This Quality Programme has become the industry standard.
- The implementation of the recommendations of the Mushroom Task Force will put the mushroom industry on a more competitive footing. Irish exports to the UK market are valued at €100m.
- Ensuring that there is full traceability from 'farm to fork' for potatoes, the Potato Growers and Potato Packers Act 1984 has been amended and the registration number of the grower must be put on the bag in addition to the packer number.

We will further develop the organic sector through an increase at production level and the development of a single national label to take advantage of both the 'clean green' image of Irish agriculture and the added appeal of organic food.

- The Organic Action Plan was produced in April 2002 and by end 2003 all the key recommendations had been implemented.
- A census of organic production has been completed and currently there are 274 organic producers with 30,000 hectares in organic production/conversion.

We will set the quality of service, including the efficient and timely delivery of payments, as an integral part of all operational priorities.

- Our record in relation to the timely delivery of direct payments is comparable to the best in other EU Member States.

- A consultative process on all aspects of the next Customer Service Action Plan (2005-07) and a Customer Charter, both to be introduced in 2004, is currently underway.

We will give urgent consideration to the potential for tax incentives for long-term leasing of land as a means of increasing the supply of land available to young farmers.

- The 2004 Finance Act extended the rental income tax exemption for land leased-out on a long-term basis. The age limit for farmers eligible for the relief was reduced from 55 years to 40 years and the income exemption rates were also increased from:
 - €7,618.43 to €10,000 for leases of 7 years or more; *and from*
 - €5,079 to €7,500 for leases of five to seven years.
- These amendments will help improve land mobility, facilitating better long-term planning and land utilisation by farmers who may be required to scale-up production at a reasonable cost, especially in the context of decoupled support payments.

We will agree a series of proposals with farming organisations designed to tackle red-tape and argue strongly for their adoption at EU level.

- While much progress has been achieved in this area with the greater use of IT, the introduction of Decoupling and the Single Payment System will greatly facilitate the simplification of application and processing procedures.

We will examine, in conjunction with the Commission, the possibility of extending the disadvantaged areas classification to the whole BMW Region.

- This matter has been informally raised with the services of the European Commission. The timing and nature of any submission requesting extension of the disadvantaged areas must be given very careful consideration

Rural Development

We will give a clear priority to the protection and development of rural communities.

- The White Paper on Rural Development is Government policy and the National Development Plan is the main vehicle for delivering the commitments in it. Policy has been reinforced by the National Spatial Strategy.
- The Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs established the Rural Agri-Tourism Advisory Group in February 2003 and established Comhairle na Tuaithe in February 2004.
- As part of Ireland's Presidency of the EU, a conference on *"Improving Living Conditions and Quality of Life in Rural Europe"* was held at the end of May 2004.
- The on-going implementation of the Leader, Peace 11 and INTERREG programmes also continues to contribute to the achievement of this overall objective. The LEADER programmes are on target for full implementation over the programme period 2001-2006. The implementation of business plans by the selected groups for their own local areas are also on target or ahead of target. The Department is involved in discussions at EU level on the continuation of the LEADER model post 2006.

We will continue the CLÁR programme, ensuring annual funding and publishing annual reports on progress. When the relevant results of the Census are available, we will review the data and consider additional areas for inclusion.

- Review completed. Revised CLÁR areas announced on 17 January 2003.

We will establish a Rural Social Economy Programme which will provide secure, community-related employment opportunities for persons in families eligible for the Farm Assist Schemes.

- The Rural Social Scheme was launched by the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs on Monday 17 May 2004.

We will ensure the implementation of the County Development Strategies in a co-ordinated way by all agencies, especially in respect of the encouragement of small enterprises.

- The County/City Development Boards (CDBs) are now implementing their Strategies via their member agencies.
- The CDBs' social inclusion co-ordinating working groups (representative of relevant public and local development bodies) are pursuing better co-ordination of social inclusion activity locally.
- The County/City Strategies contain a focus on enterprise, including micro-enterprise, the latter being largely the responsibility of County/City Enterprise Boards as members of the CDBs.
- Across a number of Departments, we are working to improve local and community development structures and programmes to bring about the more co-ordinated delivery of public and local development services at local level, taking account of the role of the CDBs.

We will examine the planning guidelines for small rural enterprises and complete the review within twelve months.

- We have established a Small Food Producers Forum involving organisations, agencies and Departments who work with small food producers to consider the difficulties faced by them. We are also funding the cost to Comhar LEADER of employing a Co-ordinator to work with such producers.

We will seek to develop the agriculture colleges as wider rural development resources.

- Teagasc is currently putting a new management structure in place. One of the first and key functions of the new management in education and training will be to examine how the role of agricultural colleges can be integrated with other Teagasc services (advisory and research) and used as centres for development.
- The commitment to develop agricultural colleges as wider rural development resources remains and is built into the Teagasc Strategy Statement.
- Most agricultural colleges are now also involved in delivering courses to young farmers and adults in the adjoining counties - in conjunction with the local Teagasc services. Due to the increasing number of part-time farmers enrolling in courses, colleges are now delivering courses at night and at times which suit people in full time employment.

We will support rural post offices and seek to develop commercial services in rural areas with specific investment being made in developing the Government Services Agency approach to provide additional services.

- A successful pilot scheme of 26 postal agencies was completed in May 2002 and the model has since been extended to more than 200 communities.

- An Post has attracted new business services for the network from banks and other financial institutions in addition to the expansion of its bill-payment service with the introduction of bill payment facilities to ESB and, most importantly, post office banking services offered by AIB.
- The Post Offices Divisions of An Post is now trading profitably.

PROMOTING TOURISM

We believe that the Tourism industry will continue to be a vital industry and that it requires sustained support and investment in the coming years.

- We have completed a major strategic review of tourism policy and performance entitled "New Horizons for Irish Tourism: An Agenda for Action" which was launched by the Minister in September 2003. The report of the Review Group, which has been well received by the industry, charts a new direction for Irish Tourism in the 21st century.
- It foresees a doubling of tourism revenue to €6 billion with an associated increase in visitor numbers from 6 million to 10 million over the ten year period to 2012. Over 70 recommended actions have been identified in the report and these are being driven forward by an Implementation Group established by the Minister. The Group is expected to produce its first progress report soon.

We will broaden our source markets so that we are not over-reliant on any one market and, in particular, seek to increase our share of the Continental European market.

We will foster expansion and competition on air and sea routes.

- Tourism Marketing Programmes for 2004 will support new route development and will be coordinated with the marketing activities of the air and sea carriers.
- Capacity lost on trans-Atlantic routes in 2001 has now been recovered.
- Discussions have taken place with the major air carriers to encourage new route development. For example, Aer Lingus will open 13 new routes in 2004 and Continental Airlines will increase its capacity on the North Atlantic.

We will support and promote Tourism Ireland Limited in its work of promoting the whole island of Ireland as a tourist destination.

- A substantial budget of over €50 million was agreed in respect of the activities of Tourism Ireland in 2004.
- Detailed Tourism Marketing Plans were launched in early December last for 2004.
- An intensive programme of promotional activities was agreed for 2004.
- 2004 will see the biggest budget ever for frontline tourism marketing activities for the island of Ireland.

We will complete the task of creating a new National Tourism Development Authority which will complement the work of Tourism Ireland

- New legislation was enacted in April, 2003 to establish the National Tourism Development Authority.

- The new Authority, Fáilte Ireland, became operational in May, 2003 and a new board was appointed at that time.
- Fáilte Ireland provides strategic and practical support to develop and sustain Ireland as a high-quality and competitive tourist destination. It works in strategic partnership with tourism interests to support the industry in its efforts to be more competitive and more profitable and to help individual enterprises to enhance their performance.

We will ensure the construction of a state of the art National Conference Centre and promote Ireland as a venue for international conference business.

- In June 2003, the Government agreed in principle to the provision of a National Conference Centre through an open competitive procurement process.
- In November, 2003, the Office of Public Works published a Notice inviting Expressions of Interest in the provision of a National Conference Centre in the Dublin area.
- Four expressions of interest were received by the closing date of 21 January, 2004 and are being evaluated.
- Three of these submissions have been short-listed to proceed to the Detailed Proposals stage of the competition.
- It remains a priority to have the project brought to a conclusion at the earliest possible date.
- General conference promotional activity by the Convention Bureau of Ireland will continue in 2004.

We will put the maintenance of standards and services at the top of the tourism agenda.

- The new National Tourism Development Authority, Fáilte Ireland, has a particular remit to address quality, standards and service levels in the tourism industry. In 2004, it is taking action on a number of fronts towards this end. For example, it is supporting the industry in terms of the development of management capabilities in areas such as cost competitiveness, human resource development, marketing and finance. It is also investing significantly in enterprise development; and it is preparing an overall strategy for human resource development within the industry.
- A review of the classification/grading system for tourism accommodation is currently underway.

We will continue to support the B&B and small accommodation sector through specific marketing initiatives.

- A range of activities in support of the small and medium-sized tourism accommodation sector was announced as part of Failte Ireland's 2004 marketing plans.
- Programmes include cooperative marketing activities and education programmes for B&Bs, establishment of a representative national forum for guesthouses, working with marketing groups representing 1 star and 2 star hotels, and support for other accommodation sectors.

We will encourage year-round activity-based and special interest tourism.

- Failte Ireland's marketing budget for 2004 includes €3 million for the promotion and support of Festivals and Cultural Events, €4.9 million for Special Interest and Niche Product Marketing and €5.9 million for the International Sports Tourism Programme. In allocating support for events, account is taken of the seasonal profile with a view to spreading business throughout the year.

- A major domestic tourism marketing programme is being rolled out in 2004 with a budget of €3.3 million.

We will ensure that local authorities take account of the needs of the tourist industry in its provision of infrastructure.

- The tourism priorities for the provision of roads and other local infrastructure have been specifically referred to in the National Development Plan and are being pursued at local level by the Regional Tourism Authorities.
- The Tourism Policy Review Implementation Group is meeting relevant Government Departments and Agencies at senior level as it seeks to ensure that key tourism priorities are taken into account when key decisions are being taken about the provision of infrastructure.

We will promote sensitive development of tourist areas and encourage environmental best practice among tourism providers.

- Environmental considerations are an important element to be taken into account in the Tourism Product Development Scheme under the Regional Operational Programmes of the NDP.
- A report has been commissioned on the Green Agenda to identify the likely future shape of environmental management policy within the EU as it relates to tourism and to analyse the implications of developments on the industry.
- This work is being followed up by the National Tourism Development Agency which will devote increased attention to this area.

MARINE AND NATURAL RESOURCES

We believe strongly in the need to support, protect and develop our marine and natural resources.

We will press for fundamental reform of the Common Fisheries Policy, with the aim of sustainable development, better Governance, stakeholder involvement, conservation, stock building and maximising Ireland's access to fisheries.

- The Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) reform negotiations were completed in late 2002. The new policy provides for better governance, more stakeholder involvement and a heavy conservation emphasis, all of which were key national objectives.
- During Ireland's EU Presidency we adopted and strongly supported proposals for the establishment of Regional Advisory Councils.
- We used the Irish Presidency to focus on driving forward the conservation agenda through the development and integration of environmentally friendly fishing methods.
- Recovery plans for over exploited fish stocks have been introduced in the waters around Ireland and additional plans to protect fish stocks, where necessary, will be brought forward in close association with industry.

We will introduce a new Fleet Licensing Policy to ensure equity, transparency and an independent appeals process.

- A new open and transparent licensing policy was introduced in November 2003.

- Sea-fishing boat licensing functions were transferred from the Minister to the independent statutory Registrar General of Fishing Boats (a senior Departmental officer) on 1 July 2003 under the Fisheries (Amendment) Act 2003.
- An independent statutory appeals system has now been put in place.

We will set out long-term strategy for the sustainable development of our fishing strategy.

- The new CFP Framework Regulation agreed in December 2002 is now being implemented through a series of implementing regulations.
- Arrangements for Regional Advisory Councils were adopted under Ireland's leadership during our EU Presidency.
- In the inshore sector, a new licensing scheme to regularise the position of previously unregistered inshore vessels is being implemented.
- A Policy Statement on the future directions for the sustainable development of the sea fishing industry was launched in July. The Policy Statement includes a plan to deliver sustainable fishing for the whitefish fleet, an Infrastructural development plan, a Management Plan for sustainable inshore fishing and outlines the priorities for Ireland within the CFP.

We will establish efficient management structures and develop our fishery harbours, including electronic auctioning, new distribution networks and completion of investment programmes for harbours.

- As an initial measure designed to improve management structures, efficiency and safety of the Fishery Harbours Centres (FHCs), new charges at FHCs were introduced and came into force on 1 October 2003.
- Work on comprehensive new financial and management arrangements at FHCs is now progressing. Revised systems will be settled in 2004.
- A major €50 million development at Killybegs Fishery Harbour Centre is substantially completed.
- Major infrastructural development works are planned for Castletownbere, Rossaveel, Clogherhead and Cromane. We have funded pilot and demonstration projects in electronic auctioning.

We will develop new devolved service structures to support the sustainable management, development and protection of the marine coastal zone and seafood resources.

- In the context of the planned decentralisation of coastal zone and seafood services to Clonakilty as part of the Government Decentralisation Programme, strengthened service delivery structures will be put in place.
- Under the Fisheries (Amendment) Act 2003 we have devolved legal responsibility for the administration of the fishing vessel licensing system to the Registrar General of Fishing Vessels.

We will ensure that our ports are equipped for the demands of our growing economy, through investment and the development of seamless transport systems between road, rail and ports and best utilisation of property assets.

- €25.6 million grant aid was committed under the Seaports Measure of the National Development Plan 2000 – 2006

- High Level Review of the State Commercial Ports was published and consultation process completed on its findings
- Comprehensive Ports Policy Statement is currently being prepared which will focus on key policy issues relating to ports and will set out Government policy going forward. It is expected that the Minister will publish the policy statement following consultation with Government.

We will work to develop Ireland as a Centre of Excellence for Maritime Research.

- Following our successes in this area since 1997, The Marine Institute has embarked on a review of the 1998 national Marine Research and Technology Strategy – this will lead to a new national Marine Research and Innovation Strategy for 2005 – 2010.
- A state of the art Marine Institute headquarters and laboratory facilities has been approved by Government and is currently under construction at Oranmore, Co. Galway. It is scheduled to open in 2005.
- The research vessel Celtic Explorer (ca. €30 million) has been delivered on schedule and on budget. Ireland now has two research vessels – the Celtic Voyager and Celtic Explorer.
- Work has been completed on the upgrading of facilities at Newport Laboratory Complex which is a world-renowned centre of excellence in salmon and catchment management research.
- The completion of the capital infrastructure investment since 1997 sees Ireland attain a world class status in terms of its national marine research capabilities.
- The new national maritime college in Ringaskiddy, Co. Cork is under construction.

We will work to increase forest planting levels to 20,000 hectares per annum.

- 9,100 hectares were planted in 2003. It is expected that approximately 12,000 hectares will be planted in 2004.
- Demand for planting levels in 2005 could be as high as 23,000 with actual planting dependent on the availability of funding.
- Peter Bacon & Associates Economic Consultants were appointed in March to carry out a forest strategy review. The annual target of 20,000 hectares planting is under examination by Bacon as part of the review and in the context of creating a critical mass to establish a sustainable industry.
- The consultants are on target to present the final report by September 2004.

We will consolidate the Minerals Development Act.

- Consolidation will be affected through the Minerals Development Bill which it is hoped to put before the Oireachtas in 2004.

We will encourage further exploration for hydrocarbons and minerals while maximising the value added to the Irish economy.

- Revised terms for Licensing Options has resulted in an increased level of exploration and interest in the Celtic Sea.
- A decision by Mayo County Council to grant planning permission for a gas terminal for the Corrib Gas Field was published on 30 April 2004.

- We have launched a new licensing round in the NE part of the Rockall Basin. Other licensing initiatives will follow on and extend into 2006.

We will increase the opportunities for offshore wind and wave energy generation.

- Under our AER VI policy we have provided support for 50 MW of offshore wind capacity.
- This is the first time offshore wind energy projects have been supported under AER.
- Future supports for renewable energy technologies are being developed with the technical assistance of SEI following a consultation process, which was published by the Department last December.
- To date, under the Sustainable Energy Ireland €16 million R&D programme for renewables, a total of 41 non-wind renewable energy projects have been supported at a cost of €4.5 million. The projects cover biomass, hydro, ocean energy, heat pumps and geothermal technologies.
- The Marine Institute are also involved in a number of Research projects in this area which include, a Protocol Device Development project as well as developing the Terms of Reference for an updated Wave Resource Atlas. There is also a planned initiative to expand the technical and research and development capabilities of ocean energy.

BUILDING AN INCLUSIVE SOCIETY

We are committed to the objective of achieving real and sustained social progress.

We will reduce consistent poverty to below 2%.

- This target is to be achieved over the period to 2007. A national survey was carried out in 2003 to establish the current level of consistent poverty. This survey is called EU-SILC (European Survey of Income and Living Conditions) and is replacing the European Community Household Panel and the Living in Ireland Survey, which was conducted by the ESRI, from survey year 2003 onwards. The CSO is responsible for EU-SILC since it has a statutory basis in EU statistical law.

In particular, we recognise the tackling of child poverty as a core element of our work.

- Child poverty has been identified as one of the special initiatives under the Partnership Agreements.
- The Office for Social Inclusion in the Department of Social and Family Affairs has lead responsibility for co coordinating this initiative. It is working closely with the National Children's Office, relevant Government Departments, the Combat Poverty Agency and the Social Partners in developing and implementing a multi dimensional policy response.
- A number of policy issues and objectives which must be progressed in order to meet this objective have been identified and will be put to the Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion for consideration. It has been agreed to commission a study looking at child income support arrangements including the effectiveness of Child Dependant Allowance and Family Income Supplement. The terms of reference for the study are being finalised and have been circulated to the Social Partners for comment.
- At the end of April 2004, the National Children's Office, working with the Department of Social and Family Affairs, issued a request for tenders for a Children's Longitudinal Study that will examine the progress and well being of children at critical periods from birth to adulthood. Further analysis will be undertaken to address obstacles to employment, with particular reference to lone parents, in the light of NESC research and the OECD report on family friendly policies. Work

also commenced in July to examine issues relevant to parenting alone. Work is ongoing in relation to improving linkages between Departments and Agencies with responsibility for children.

- Work on the Ending Child Poverty initiative will be closely aligned to other Special Initiatives relating to Care, Educational Disadvantage and Long term Unemployed and Vulnerable Workers to ensure that the child poverty dimension of each is fully addressed.

We will implement a full range of policies aimed at supporting older people including delivering decent pensions and greatly improved care services.

- Old age pensioners received a €10 increase in Budget 2004 which is over three and a half times the projected rate of inflation in 2004 (2.5%).
- Our policy is to provide the necessary community based supports to enable older people to live in dignity in their own community in accordance with their wishes for as long as possible. Research indicates that older people prefer to live at home for as long as possible and that long-stay residential care is only considered by an individual as the last resort.
- Our policy has been to develop community based services and additional revenue funding allocated to Services for Older People from 1997 to 2003 significantly increased from €12.7m in 1997 to an additional €11.407m in 2003.
- In 2004, a total of €9.5 million in additional revenue funding was allocated to services for older people. This funding has been used for a variety of important services.

We will implement the revised National Anti-Poverty Strategy with its ambitious targets across a broad range of areas.

- The institutional structures to support the NAPS have been established including the Office for Social Inclusion, the Social Inclusion Consultative Group, and the Social Inclusion Forum (under the auspices of the NESF).
- The National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion 2003 – 2005 was submitted to the EU Commission in July 2003 and was well received. The Joint Inclusion Report on the National Action Plans of all (15) Member States was adopted at the Spring European Council under the Irish Presidency.
- Budget 2004 represented a significant step towards the key NAPS target - *“To achieve a rate of €150 per week in 2002 terms for the lowest rates of social welfare to be met by 2007 and the appropriate equivalence level of basic child income support to be set at 33%-35% of the minimum adult social welfare payment rate”* - with €10 per week increase being provided in the rate of the lowest social welfare payments.

We will bring the targeting of health inequalities to the fore in health policy.

- The targets to reduce health inequalities set in the Government’s Review of the NAPS have been integrated into the National Health Strategy.
- Because of the wide range of factors which affect health status and health inequalities, both the National Health Strategy *Quality and Fairness: A Health System for You* and the Report of the Working Group on NAPS and Health envisage these targets being met through a range of actions including greater focus on multi-sectoral work and health impact assessment.
- A health element has been included in Ireland’s *National Action Plan Against Poverty and Social Exclusion 2003-2005* (NAPs/incl) published in August 2003 – an EU requirement in relation to progressing the Lisbon agenda.

- Health agencies have been asked in the Letter of Determination to prioritise actions to reduce health inequalities when framing their Services Plans. Furthermore, the Chief Executive Officer of each health Board was asked to prioritise its funding allocations in favour of the RAPID and CLÁR projects.
- The important role of primary care in effectively addressing health inequalities was highlighted in the NAPS consultation process and in the Report of the NAPS Health Working Group.
- In May 2003 the Department of Health and Children and the Combat Poverty Agency jointly launched the Agency's *Building Healthy Communities* programme which has a specific focus on community development approaches to reducing health inequalities.
- The report *Ireland's Changing Heart* – the second report on the implementation of the Cardiovascular Health Strategy – highlights the importance of addressing health inequalities in the context of strategy implementation. The commitment to reduce health inequalities will also be taken on board in the new National Cancer Strategy and in the work of the Expert Group on Mental Health Policy.
- The Department of Health and Children and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety in Northern Ireland are carrying out a study of Travellers' health to develop the indicators collected in the 1987 study of Travellers' health and to inform appropriate actions required in the area of Travellers' health.
- Performance Indicators for a number of groups at risk of social exclusion have been included in the national suite of Performance Indicators developed jointly by the Department of Health and Children and the health boards and currently in use in the context of the annual Service Plans.
- The National Health Strategy asserts quite clearly that to achieve better health for everyone and to reduce health inequalities, health must be put at the centre of public policy. In this context health impact assessment (HIA) is being developed so that relevant policies, strategies and legislation undergo a comprehensive process of health proofing so that their impact on the physical, mental and social well-being of the population is positive.

We will ensure that homelessness and rough sleeping in particular is tackled in a coordinated manner in all parts of the country.

- Virtually all local homeless action plans have now been finalised and work is underway on implementing the measures in them. A number of local authorities have completed these plans and are now drafting their next three year plans.
- The continued implementation of the *Government's Integrated and Preventative Homeless Strategies* remains a priority and we are now preparing to review the operation of them. This process will involve consultation with all relevant stakeholders, including voluntary and statutory bodies and homeless persons themselves. The key task will be to build on the strength of the strategies to date and to eliminate any blockages to their implementation. This review is to commence shortly.
- A wide range of additional accommodation, ranging from emergency accommodation to long-term sheltered accommodation, has been provided throughout the country. In addition, in the three year period 2001 to 2003, almost 1,500 homeless persons have been housed by the local authority and voluntary housing sectors and the Housing Access Unit in Dublin.
- A number of new initiatives have come on stream to specifically target people sleeping rough.
 - Additional outreach teams have been established to make contact with people sleeping rough and assist them into accommodation,
 - Dublin City Council has a nightly bus service which takes people from the streets to available accommodation
 - A low threshold shelter for up to 24 street drinkers opened in late 2002.

- A long-term supported housing project for street drinkers has been given planning permission and will proceed to tendering shortly.
- Outside Dublin, a wet hostel opened in Limerick city in late 2002 and in Tralee a direct access hostel opened in late 2003 with facilities for people with high dependencies. In addition, improved accommodation facilities for homeless persons have been provided in Cork, Galway and Longford in 2003.
- The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government's allocation for the provision of accommodation and related services in 2004 is €1million, which compares to €12.5million in 1999. This allocation is in addition to funding provided by other Government Departments.

We recognise the need to work hard to include all communities in the benefits of recent progress and will, in particular, ensure that all state agencies prioritise integrated work in areas of significant disadvantage. This will be a priority under the next phase of public sector reform.

- Through programmes like the Local Development and RAPID Programmes, the Young Peoples Facilities and Services Fund and the work of the Local and Regional Drugs Task Forces, we are working to include all communities, particularly areas of significant disadvantage, in the benefits of recent progress.
- Through this work, every effort is made to ensure that State agencies operate in an integrated manner.

We will work to generate the resources to achieve our new benchmark level of €150 for social welfare payments.

- General social welfare payments received an increase of €10 in Budget 2004, over three and a half times the projected rate of inflation in 2004 (2.5%).
- The general social welfare payment now stands at €134.80.
- The target of €150 (in 2002 terms) will be delivered over the period to 2007.

We will publish an annual report of progress towards the achievement of anti-poverty indicators.

- Work is being carried out to develop the necessary data for this report.

We will fund an ambitious programme of data gathering on social indicators to ensure that policies are developed on the basis of sound information.

- A comprehensive data strategy is being prepared under the auspices of the Office of Social Inclusion to monitor progress in implementing the NAPs targets and to advance research and policy in relation to poverty.

We will work to promote social capital in all parts of Irish life through a combination of research and ensuring that local public activity supports the development of social capital, particularly on a local community level.

- In October 2003 the National Economic and Social Forum published a Report entitled 'The Policy Implications of Social Capital'. The Report explores in detail the various elements that comprise social capital and examines the implications and benefits of social capital to society.

We will continue to support initiatives to expand corporate social responsibility.

- The intention is that, in progressing our agenda for community, local and rural development, we will progressively deal with promoting and piloting local corporate social responsibility initiatives, e.g., in relation to areas affected by drugs, and social and rural disadvantage.
- We will also continue to provide supports centrally to Local Development Partnerships, LEADER Groups and Community Groups, whose activities include accessing support from the business community for projects targeting the disadvantaged. Such projects include provision by companies of work experience for the long-term unemployed, sponsorship of third-level education for disadvantaged students, mentoring of business start-ups by unemployed people, and financial support of homework clubs and breakfast clubs in disadvantaged schools.
- In addition, a grant of €105,000 per annum over three years has been approved for Business in the Community Ireland (BITCI) to assist it in helping the community and voluntary sector enhance its capacity to engage with the corporate sector.

HEALTH

The development of a world-class public health service is a core objective for us. Based on the blueprint set out in the National Health Strategy, a combination of greater investment and a reform of the system will provide a high quality and accessible health service for all. It will ensure a major expansion in the level and quality of services throughout the country. And it will encourage the end of the two-tier health system by ensuring that public patients will have access to timely and quality services in all parts of the system.

We will implement the National Health Strategy, through a coordinated multi-annual programme of service development.

- A report on progress in implementation of the Strategy in 2002 across all 121 actions is available and a report on progress in 2003 is currently being compiled.
- Specific developments are addressed throughout this document under the relevant care areas.

We believe that it is necessary to improve the transparency and effectiveness of the administration and funding of acute services as distinct from the other full range of areas funded by health boards. As part of a full examination of health bodies and structures, we will examine the separation of acute services from the core work of health boards and, at a minimum, ensure that the budget and service planning process are separated.

And,

We will seek the completion of the report on Health Agencies and Management Structures by the end of 2002 and will move forward on the principle of removing unnecessary overlap of functions and minimising delays in implementing service improvements.

- In June 2003 the Government introduced the Health Service Reform Programme based on system reviews. The priority actions agreed are as follows:
 - A major rationalisation of existing health service agencies to reduce fragmentation. This includes the abolition of the existing health board/authority structures,
 - The reorganisation of the Department of Health and Children, to ensure improved policy development and oversight,
 - The establishment of a Health Service Executive which will be the first ever body charged with managing the health service as a single national entity. The Executive will be organised on the basis of 3 core divisions:
 - National Hospitals Office
 - Primary, Community and Continuing Care Directorate
 - National Shared Services Centre

- Since the Government announced its Reform Programme last summer, its vision has begun to take shape and Phase I has been completed. This involved a widespread communications and consultation process and the establishment of a range of Action Projects to think through and flesh out specific aspects of the Programme.
- The current phase of the Reform Programme consists of four distinct but inter-related strands of activity which will take place over the course of the year. The first strand is the work of the Board of the Interim Health Service Executive. The second strand relates to the work of the Acute Hospitals Review Group chaired by Mr David Hanly. The third strand is the ongoing work in the Department of Health and Children on aspects of the reform programme for which it has lead responsibility. The final strand is the work of the CEOs of the Health Boards in continuing to deliver services, whilst also actively engaging in the change programme. The leaders of these four inter-connected strands must operate in partnership.
- The Health (Amendment) Bill 2004, which was published on 16 April 2004, represents a further phase in the implementation of the Reform Programme. It provides for the termination of office of the members of the seven health boards, the Eastern Regional Health Authority and its three area health boards. The Bill also assigns the functions, which are currently carried out by the members of the Boards/Authority to the Chief Executive Officers of the Boards/Authority or the Minister, as appropriate.
- In addition, it is the intention to publish a second Bill later in the year to provide for the establishment of the Health Service Executive (HSE) and the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) on a statutory basis. This further legislation will also provide the legislative basis for other aspects of the Reform Programme such as improved governance and accountability, planning, monitoring and evaluation. It is planned that this legislation will be introduced by December 2004 so as to have the Health Services Executive in place in January 2005.
- The establishment of the board of the Interim Health Service Executive was announced last November and they have met on a number occasions. The establishment of the Board changes forever the landscape of the Irish Health Service. The Interim HSE is a key element, not just in transforming the delivery system for Health in line with the Government decision but in achieving the goals and objectives set out in Quality and Fairness for the provision of a world-class health service.
- We have also appointed a National Steering Committee to oversee the implementation of the four strands. Its role is to provide a co-ordinating forum and to ensure overall consistency with the Government's Decision. It will report on a regular basis to the Cabinet Committee on the Health Strategy.

We will treat people within new national guidelines for maximum waiting times set out in the National Health Strategy

And,

We will ensure that, in line with timings set out in the Strategy, all persons will be given an appointment for treatment within three months of referral with this being achieved through a combination of bed capacity, primary care, secondary care and targeted reform initiatives.

And,

We will seek to gain the maximum benefit for public patients from private hospital capacity through initiatives such as the Treatment Purchase Fund.

- The target set out in the National Health Strategy states that by the end of 2004 all public patients requiring admission to hospital will be scheduled to commence treatment within a maximum of three months of referral from an out-patient department. Intermediate targets have been set to achieve this aim to ensure that the focus is being turned towards those patients waiting longest for treatment.
- The Minister for Health and Children has now transferred responsibility for the recording and publishing of waiting list figures to the National Treatment Purchase Fund. The NTPF has a

multi-disciplinary team who have been working with individual hospitals to identify patients on waiting lists.

- On 4th May, 2004 the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) reported that waiting times have fallen significantly with 37% of patients now waiting between 3 and 6 months and 43% waiting between 6 and 12 months for surgery. Therefore, 80% of patients now wait less than one year for surgical treatment. This represents a major reduction in the length of time patients have to wait.
- The NTPF has the available capacity to treat patients and will continue to focus on reducing waiting times even further. The Fund's target is to treat over 12,000 patients in 2004 and has the capacity to treat a minimum of 1,000 patients per month in Ireland and in the United Kingdom. If referrals can be maintained at this level the NTPF expects that waiting times for surgical operations should be reduced further and bring them in line with the Health Strategy targets of 3-6 months.
- In 2004 some €31 million was allocated to the Health Boards and Eastern Regional Health Authority as base funding to fund consultant and other support staff costs associated with reducing elective waiting lists. Funding for the National Treatment Purchase Fund was also increased to €14 million in 2004. Therefore the total amount of dedicated funding available to tackle waiting lists in 2004 is €75 million.

We will expand public hospital beds in line with a programme to increase total capacity by 3,000 during the period of the Strategy.

- Under the first phase of the acute bed capacity initiative €118m has been provided to health boards/authority to open an additional 709 beds and to facilitate the discharge of appropriate patients from acute hospitals to private nursing homes and ongoing support in the community thereby freeing up acute beds.
- 584 of the 709 beds in the first phase have been commissioned up to the end of April 2004. Funding has been made available to health boards/authority to commission the balance of the 709 beds this year.

We will explore the potential for long-term contractual arrangements between public health bodies and private, especially non-profit, providers.

- The Department of Health and Children has met with individuals and groups interested in the development of private acute hospital facilities in the state particularly in the context of tax reliefs provided under the Finance Acts. Many of the meetings were of an exploratory nature and the Department continues to be available to discuss proposed projects with the promoters as they arise.
- Health boards/authority have in the past and continue to enter arrangements with private providers in their respective regions for the provision of diagnostic and treatment facilities for public patients.
- The National Treatment Purchase Fund since it was set up has sourced capacity in the private hospital sector to provide treatment for public patients waiting longest for treatment.

We will reform the system of planning and funding our hospitals to ensure that the needs of people in all parts of the country are addressed, and that public funding is producing the highest possible level and quality of care.

- The Health Service Reform Programme involves the radical restructuring of the Health Service and the Department of Health and Children. It is a very significant change management programme involving an organisation with a budget of over €10 billion per annum, and staffing in excess of 100,000.

- The implementation of the reform programme is underway and will result in a single unitary national structure for health service planning and delivery.
- The new structures will ensure a stronger more effective health system and an improved health service for patients and clients.
- The Government's programme of reform sets out the most ambitious change programme for the Health Service in over thirty years. The key elements of the programme include:
 - A major rationalisation of existing health service agencies including the abolition of the existing health board/authority structures.
 - The establishment of a Health Services Executive which will be the first ever body charged with managing the health service as a single national entity.
 - The establishment of a Health Information and Quality Authority to ensure that quality of care is promoted throughout the system.
 - The reorganisation of the Department of Health and Children to ensure improved policy development and oversight.
 - The modernisation of the system's supporting processes (Service Planning; Management Reporting etc.) so that they will be in line with recognised international best practice.
 - The strengthening of governance and accountability across the system.

We will improve the staffing of our hospitals by expanding the number of nurses working in key professional positions, hiring additional consultants and more health professionals, especially in priority areas, including general practice and emergency facilities.

- There has been an increase of almost 28,000 (41%) in the approved employment ceiling for the health services since 1997 bringing the authorised employment ceiling to 95,800 at the end of 2003.
- *The increases for the health service since 1997 are as follows:* Medical / Dental - The end of 2003 total of 6,792 represents an increase of 36.5%(1,816) since 1997. This figure includes an end of 2003 total of 1,773 consultants representing an increase of 34.4% (454) since 1997.
- Nursing – The end of 2003 total of 33,766 represents an increase of 23.47%(6419) since 1997.
- Health and Social Care Professionals – The end of 2003 total of 12,690 represents an increase of 112.58% (6720) since 1997.

We will develop acute hospital services on a balanced regional basis, with the particular objective of seeking to achieve the highest level of regional self-sufficiency consistent with maximising patient outcomes.

- The Hanly Report was published in October 2003 and provides a roadmap towards an integrated network of acute hospitals which work closely together to meet the needs of patients in the most effective way possible. This will include local, general and major hospitals in each region.
- In terms of Phase One Implementation, the Minister for Health and Children established Implementation Groups in both the East Coast and Mid Western regions on 27 February 2004. These include management and health professionals across all of the hospitals involved. They will carry out the detailed work on identifying what services can be provided in each hospital, in line with the Hanly recommendations.
- The groups have also been asked to work to ensure that medical cover continues to be provided overnight in each hospital. While the Hanly Report has clearly outlined the role to be played by each hospital, it recommends that there should be a process involving relevant management, medical and other professionals to determine the appropriate allocation of surgical and other services to local hospitals.

- With regard to Phase Two, the Minister announced the composition of a group to prepare a national plan for acute hospital services. The group is chaired by David Hanly and contains a wide range of expertise from the areas of medicine, nursing, health and social care professions and management. It also includes an expert in spatial planning and representation of the public interest.
- The Group has been asked to prepare a plan for the Interim Health Services Executive for the reorganisation of acute hospital services, taking account of the recommendations of the National Task Force on Medical Staffing including spatial, demographic and geographic factors.
- It is important to note, given the level of misrepresentation, that there is no question of closing or 'downgrading' any hospital. The Hanly proposals involve substantial improvements to local hospitals. Contrary to claims of 'losing' their A&E service, local hospitals will continue to see 75-80% of their existing A&E workload. Only major trauma and other complex cases will need to be treated, for the best possible service to patients, in larger hospitals.
- Any changes to hospital services will be put in place on a phased basis, taking account of existing services and the ability of hospitals to take on new roles.

We recognise the particular need to ensure that people in all parts of the country have reasonable access to cancer services and will ensure that this objective is achieved.

- Since 1997, there has been a cumulative investment of approximately €50million in the development of cancer services. This includes a sum of €15 million which was allocated in 2004 for cancer services. This investment will ensure that this year we continue to address service pressures in oncology/haematology, including oncology drug treatments.
- This funding has enabled the approval of an additional 91 consultant posts in key areas of cancer services.
- Since 1997, approximately €5 million in capital funding has been allocated specifically for the development of cancer related initiatives. These include an investment of €60 million in Radiation Oncology, €8.75 million in the Bone Marrow Unit at St. James Hospital and €1.9 million in BreastCheck.
- The key goal of the National Cancer Strategy was to achieve a 15 per cent decrease in mortality from cancer in the under-65 year age group in the 10 year period from 1994. The Deloitte Evaluation of the National Cancer Strategy, published in December 2003 demonstrated that this figure was achieved in 2001, 3 years ahead of target.
- In 2004 €15.092m was allocated for cancer services. This includes an allocation of €3.5 million which is being used to implement the recommendations contained in the Report on the Development of Radiation Oncology Services in Ireland which was launched in October of last year. Its recommendations have been accepted by Government and provide a framework for the future development of radiation oncology services nationally.
- Breast Cancer is the individual site-specific cancer which has received the most investment in recent years. To date a cumulative figure of approximately €50 million in revenue funding has been allocated to BreastCheck since 1999.
- The National Breast Screening Programme commenced in February 2000 with phase one covering the Eastern Regional Health Authority, Midland Health Board and North Eastern Health Board areas. Screening is being offered free of charge to all women in those areas in the target age group. By the end of May 2003, the number of women invited for screening for the first time was 130,473. The number invited for screening for the second time was 14,994. The uptake rate up to December 2002 was 71 per cent among women attending for the first time and 81 per cent among women attending for the second time.

- Last year, we announced the extension of the BreastCheck programme to counties Carlow, Kilkenny and Wexford and the national roll out to the West and Southern parts of the country. Screening commenced for women in Wexford for the first time earlier this year. Screening in Carlow and Kilkenny will follow shortly.

We believe that taxation can play an important role in the work to limit tobacco consumption and in raising revenue for the health services. In order to make this possible, we will urgently seek the agreement of the social partners to the disregarding of the tobacco-related element of the Consumer Prices Index when using the Index as a basis for negotiations.

- In the 2004 Budget the price of cigarettes was increased again and from a public health perspective this is welcome. Price is an important deterrent in preventing young persons from initiating smoking and becoming addicted and in encouraging smokers to break their addiction.
- The SLÁN National Health and Lifestyle Surveys show a significant drop in smoking prevalence in the population from 31% to 27%. Price increases, among other things, have contributed to this.
- The question of removing tobacco products from the CPI has been raised with the social partners and at EU level and will continue to be addressed.

We will seek to expand the use of information and communication technologies in all aspects of the health service especially as a support to broadening access to expert care.

- A significant increase has been provided for ICT in the health services since the programme for government was launched. The amount earmarked in this year's estimate is €60 million which is double the amount earmarked in 2003.
- The priority for spending in 2004 will be national ICT programmes which will underpin the implementation of the Brennan Commission's report. The NHIS (National Health Information Strategy) has also been approved by Government.

We will implement a full range of measures to improve Accident and Emergency Services by significantly reducing waiting times and having senior doctors available at all times.

- Improved and expanded Emergency Medicine Departments are being provided through NDP funding in many acute hospitals throughout the country. The establishment of minor injuries units, chest pain clinics and medical assessment units will also improve the operation of Emergency Medicine Departments.
- An additional 29 Emergency Medicine Consultants are being recruited for Emergency (A&E) Departments throughout the country. A total of 20 are now in place and the other posts are being progressed by the health boards and ERHA.
- There are now 51 Emergency Medicine Consultant posts in acute hospitals which is a 260% increase in numbers since 1997 when there were 14 consultants posts. The availability of senior medical staff in Emergency Medicine Departments should facilitate rapid clinical decision making, enhanced management, diagnosis and treatment of patients.
- A review of the nurse staffing levels in Emergency Departments is being progressed by the Health Services Employers Agency in consultation with the health service management representatives and the nursing unions.

We will give hospitals extra resources where they can specifically show how, as a result, they can treat more patients in a more efficient way.

- In discussions with health agencies the Department is continuing to explore the possibility of increasing the amount of elective activity that can be undertaken on a day basis. Day case treatments now accounts for 50% of all elective surgery. Discussions will continue with health agencies as part of the Service Planning process to identify areas for improved efficiency.
- In 2003, for the first time ever there were over 1 million people (inpatient discharges and day cases) treated in public acute hospitals. Day cases treated increased by 37,000 or over 10% in 2003 by comparison to 2002.

We will implement a series of measures to significantly improve the level of orthodontic care available to public patients.

- The Chief Executive Officers of the health boards/authority have informed the Department of Health and Children that at the end of the March quarter 2004, there were 21,033 children receiving orthodontic treatment in the public orthodontic service.
- This means that there are nearly twice as many children getting orthodontic treatment as there are children waiting to be treated and almost 4,000 extra children are getting treatment from health boards/authority since the end of 2001.
- The grade of Specialist in Orthodontics has been created in the health board orthodontic service. Last year, with the health boards we funded thirteen dentists from various health boards for Specialist in Orthodontics qualifications at training programmes in Ireland and at two separate universities in the United Kingdom.
- These thirteen trainees for the public orthodontic service are additional to the six dentists who commenced their training in 2001; thus there is an aggregate of nineteen public service dentists currently in training for Specialist in Orthodontics qualifications.
- These measures will complement the other structural changes being introduced into the orthodontic service, including the creation of an auxiliary grade of Orthodontic Therapist to work in the orthodontic area.
- Furthermore, our commitment to training development is manifested in the funding provided to both the training of specialist clinical staff and the recruitment of a Professor in Orthodontics for the Cork Dental School. This appointment will facilitate the development of an approved training programme leading to specialist qualification in orthodontics.
- Orthodontic Initiative funding of €4.698m was provided to the health boards/authority in 2001 and this has enabled health boards to recruit additional staff, engage the services of private specialist orthodontic practitioners to treat patients and build additional orthodontic facilities.
- In June 2002, the Department provided additional funding of €5 million from the Treatment Purchase Fund to Health Boards specifically for the purchase of orthodontic treatment. This funding is enabling boards to provide both additional sessions for existing staff and purchase treatment from private specialist orthodontic practitioners.

We will ensure that independent and up to date data on activity within the health sector is provided by agencies and is regularly published.

- Improvements in timeliness of the dissemination of activity data from the health sector are being achieved through the utilisation of electronic media. In particular, the Internet is increasingly being used for publication of these data.
- The National Health Information Strategy has been approved by the Government and will introduce further measures which will be instrumental in achieving additional improvements in the timeliness, quality and accessibility of health and health services data.

A set of national quality protocols will also be developed which will require that all patients, irrespective of where they live, receive a high quality of care.

- A key policy aim under the National Health Strategy is to deliver high quality services that are based on evidence support best practice. To promote this aim a Health Information and Quality Authority will be established. The Authority will:
 - develop and disseminate agreed standards and guidelines/models of best practice as templates for the development of local care protocols,
 - introduce and oversee accreditation processes across the health system. This will include, in relation to the acute hospitals area, working closely with the Hospitals Accreditation Body,
 - promote formal health impact assessment programmes,
 - promote and advise national initiatives on patient safety,
 - liaise with the proposed new Irish Clinical Negligence Claims Agency on risk management.
- Currently, a group is working in the Department of Health and Children to make arrangements for the establishment of HIQA on an interim basis and to have the scope, functions and legislative underpinning of HIQA ready to enable it to be established on a statutory basis by January 2005.

We will complete the programme of expansion of appropriate care places for people with disabilities, with, in particular, the ending of the inappropriate use of psychiatric hospitals for persons with intellectual disabilities.

- See Disability and Caring Section

We will implement a major reform and development of primary care services. As a starting point 24-hour GP cover will be extended throughout the country by implementing a new co-operative and out-of-hours service.

- The total funding provided by Government since 2000 for the development of general practice out of hours co-operative services is €46.50m. There is now an out of hours co-operative in each health board area and the ERHA and as reported earlier the consistent investment in this area has resulted in the situation where the co-operatives are near true regional status in a number of health board areas.
- It should be noted that the general success of the co-ops has led to demands from boards for even further funds for expansion, in cases where the doctors have expressed growing interest in the development.
- We remain committed to continuing to provide funding to ensure that this important initiative continues to expand to cover the whole country in line with the target set out in the Primary Care Strategy.

We will develop a network of primary care centres where general practitioners, community health nurses, physiotherapists and other professionals will work together to improve care available to all groups.

- Since the publication of the Primary Care Strategy, *Primary Care: A New Direction*, significant progress has been achieved on many fronts and the Primary Care Task Force, working in partnership with a range of interests, is driving the implementation of the primary care strategy.
- The implementation process is being overseen by the National Primary Care Steering Group, which includes representation from the medical and nursing professions, health and social care professionals, the Community and Voluntary Pillar, service users, statutory agencies and service providers.

- In particular, there has been substantial progress to date in the development of the ten initial primary care teams - one in each health board area - which were approved in late 2002. The necessary funding to enable the appointment of additional personnel has been provided in each case. Once-off capital funding of €2m and a further €1m in respect of information and communications technology supports for the teams was also provided in 2002.
- Already, some of the teams are providing new or enhanced primary care services to their target populations. Areas which are the focus of early efforts to provide new or enhanced services include physiotherapy, which has traditionally been provided as a hospital out-patient service, shared care arrangements with the general hospitals, and the development of social work services which will focus on general family support needs.
- The development of future primary care teams will be informed by a needs assessment process at regional and local level. A macro-level primary care needs assessment has been undertaken by each health board. A combined national document, involving the collation of the individual boards' outputs, is in preparation. This will inform detailed national human resources planning for the future, which will include ensuring that the capacity requirements of primary care are addressed.

We will extend medical card eligibility in line with the recommendations of the National Health Strategy and, further review cases for the extension of both the medical card and long-term illness schemes.

- The Health Strategy includes a commitment that significant improvements will be made in the medical card income guidelines in order to increase the number of persons on low income who are eligible for a medical card and to give priority to families with children and particularly children with a disability. This should be viewed in the broader context of the Strategy's emphasis on fairness and its stated objective of reducing health inequalities in our society.
- Due to the prevailing budgetary situation it is not possible to meet this commitment this year but the Government remains committed to the introduction of the necessary changes within its lifetime.
- A whole series of initiatives have been developed to clarify and expand the existing arrangements for eligibility for health services, including recommendations arising from the Review of the Medical Card Scheme carried out by the Health Board CEOs under the PPF.

We will encourage the entry of additional insurers into the private health insurance market.

- The Health Insurance (Amendment) Act, 2003, was signed into law by the President on 16th April, 2003. It retains the three year exemption from risk equalisation provided for under the Health Insurance (Amendment) Act, 2001. It contains provisions aimed at securing a clearer indication of the commitment and serious business intent to actually follow through on entry to the market, on the part of insurers who decide to serve a notice of exemption in the future.
- In that regard, it requires insurers to be registered with the Health Insurance Authority before serving a notice of exemption and that they commence business not later than three months after the date of the notice.
- It is expected that another insurer (currently making arrangements in relation to market entry) will be entering the market during the coming months.

We will develop community facilities for the elderly, including community nursing units, in such a way as to actively promote independence.

- The National Health Strategy proposed the provision of an extra 800 extended care/community nursing unit places per year over a 7-year period which will include provision for people with dementia.
- Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) are currently being piloted in the health sector. Initially, the focus will be mainly in the area of Community Nursing Units (CNU) for Older People.
- It is anticipated that 17 new CNU will be created when the initial Pilot Programmes are complete, providing up to a maximum of 850 new beds in Dublin and Cork.

EDUCATION

We are committed to improve the level and quality of participation and achievement at every level of education.

To ensure that early-education services deliver the maximum benefit for all children, we will introduce a national early-education, training, support and certification system and expand state-funded early-education places. Priority will be given to a new national system of funded early-education for children with intellectual disabilities and children in areas of concentrated disadvantage

- A Centre for Early Childhood Education has been established.
- The functions of this centre are to develop a national quality framework for the sector and to promote enhanced access for children at risk.
- The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment has published “Towards a Framework for Early Learning”, which sets out the basis for the first national framework for learning from birth to six years.
- The publication of an OECD review of early childhood care and education provision in Ireland will inform the work on this project.
- A range of targeted interventions will be piloted and developed for disadvantaged children, building on the results of Early Start and other initiatives.
- We are currently finalising a detailed review of educational disadvantage schemes.

We will continue to reduce the pupil/teacher ratio in our schools. Over the next five years, we will progressively introduce maximum class size guidelines which will ensure that the average class size of classes for children under 9 will be below international best-practice guideline of 20:1

- At Primary Level, Pupil/ teacher ratio fell from 22.2 to 1 in the 1996/97 school year to 19 to 1 in the 2001/02 school year. The ratio for the current 2003/2004 school year is 17.44 to 1.
- Urban schools in the Breaking the Cycle Programme with the highest concentration of at risk pupils are being supported where necessary through staff allocations to implement a maximum class size of 15:1 in junior classes and 27:1 in senior classes.
- At Second Level, the actual pupil teacher ratio has declined from 16:1 in 1996/97 school year to 13.6:1 in the school year 2002/03, and to 13.48 to 1 in the 2003/2004 year.
- It is intended to make further improvements on a targeted basis as resources permit.

We will continue the expansion in teacher training, introduce reforms of teacher training courses as recommended by an expert review and ensure improved teacher supply.

- There are approximately 3,750 students in the teacher training colleges in the current academic year – 3,000 on the Bachelor of Education programme and the remainder on two Graduate Diploma programmes.
- Some 1,460 primary teachers will graduate in 2004. This compares with 500 in 1999.
- In April 2002, the report of the Working Group on Primary Preservice Teacher Education entitled *Preparing Teachers for the 21st Century* was launched. The Department of Education's Inspectorate is currently examining the report in order to facilitate policy formulation for the future.
- On 1st August 2003, the Minister announced that he would recognise graduates of a new primary teacher training course being delivered by Hibernia College for the purposes of primary teaching. It is understood that there are currently some 400 graduates pursuing the course.

We will implement changes to retention and support policies which will assist schools in areas of significant disadvantage to recruit and retain teachers.

- The report of the Educational Disadvantage Committee reviewing teacher supply and staffing in disadvantaged areas was submitted in early 2003.
- Its recommendations are under consideration in the context of a broader review of all initiatives to tackle educational disadvantage, which is currently underway.

Every school will receive support for the purchase of appropriate and age-related literacy tests to assist teachers in their work.

- Priority has been given to piloting a "Reading Recovery" intensive remediation model in 17 Monaghan (rural) and 13 Dublin North Inner City (urban) primary schools. The encouraging outcomes have led to the extension of the scheme to 41 Monaghan schools and 25 Dublin schools.
- Learning-support teaching is provided in all primary schools by over 1,500 teachers who give intensive support to children with literacy difficulties. At second level, in excess of 540 learning support teachers are employed. In addition, resource teachers are provided for students with more severe learning difficulties and disabilities.
- Continuing assistance will be given to disadvantaged primary schools in implementing the Department of Education's Learning Support Guidelines, including adoption of a whole-school approach to supporting children with literacy difficulties and development and implementation of a literacy plan by each school. One-day seminars on Literacy and the Learning Support Guidelines were delivered by Learning Support trainers to whole staffs of all designated disadvantaged schools from March to June 2003.
- In May 2003, the Educational Research Centre carried out a survey of reading literacy in primary schools designated as disadvantaged. The aim of this study is to benchmark the progress of children in first, third and sixth classes in acquiring literacy skills against national norms and to identify factors associated with literacy achievement. The results of this research will be available in 2004. A national assessment of reading in first and fifth classes is also taking place in 2004.

We will further expand adult literacy services.

- Increase in investment from €16.5 million in 2002 to €19 million in 2004, enabling expansion of numbers of students in adult literacy services run by VECs, and funded by the Department of Education and Science, to over 31,500 by end 2003.

We will continue our policy of implementing significant increases in direct school funding.

- At Primary Level, the standard capitation grant increased from €11.58 in 2002/2003 to €21.58 from January 2004
- Ancillary Services grant increased from €102 per pupil in 2001/02 to €127 in 2002/2003.
- At second level, the per capita grant was increased from €66 in September 2002 to €74.50 in January 2004.
- Under the school services support initiative there has been a significant increase in the support grant from €25.40 per pupil in the year 2000 to €99 per pupil with effect from 1 January 2003.
- Funding for voluntary secondary schools enhanced by the introduction of a range of equalisation measures. Support services grants in such schools increased by €8 per pupil from September 2002, and by a further €4 per pupil from January 2004. The support services grant stands at €31 per pupil from January 2004.
- This increase is in addition to the range of equalisation grants of up to €5,554 per school (€44.44 per pupil) per annum that was approved for voluntary secondary schools in December 2001.
- Additional direct funding measures will be considered as resources permit.

We will ensure that every pupil participates in a programme designed to increase understanding of the value and role of enterprise.

- A Board of Studies for Business was convened by the NCCA to examine the role and position of Business subjects in the post-primary school curriculum.
- Enterprise education options are part of the Leaving Certificate Applied and Transition Year programmes, and Enterprise Education is a mandatory link module within the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme. The role of enterprise within the Business Studies curriculum at Leaving Certificate Level has also been strengthened.
- Strengthening enterprise education is one of the themes currently being examined in the context of the NCCA publication "*Developing Senior Cycle Education – Directions for Development*" which sets out a vision for the type of school system which might exist by 2010. Publication of *Directions for Development in September 2003* has been followed by further analysis and consultation by the NCCA. This will lead to presentation of recommendations on implementation to the Minister for Education and Science later in 2004.

We will ensure that reducing absenteeism and early-school leaving is a core priority over the next five years. The National Education Welfare Board will begin its work this year and will, in the first instance, prioritise areas with high levels of disadvantage, especially areas contained within the RAPID programme.

- The National Educational Welfare Board was formally launched in December 2003.
- To discharge its responsibilities, the Board is developing a nationwide service to provide welfare-focused services to children, families and schools. At this stage of its development, the aim of the Board is to provide a service to the most disadvantaged areas, including areas designated under the Government's RAPID programme and most at-risk groups. Five regional teams have now been established with bases in Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford and staff have been deployed since early December 2003 in areas of greatest disadvantage and in areas designated under the Government's RAPID programme.
- Thirteen towns with significant school going populations also now have an Educational Welfare Officer allocated to them. These towns are Dundalk, Drogheda, Navan, Athlone, Carlow, Kilkenny, Wexford, Bray, Clonmel, Tralee, Ennis, Sligo and Letterkenny. In addition, the Board

will follow up on urgent cases nationally where children are not currently receiving an education.

- The Board issued an information leaflet to 330,000 families and 4,000 schools in early March 2004. The leaflet targeted parents and guardians of children aged between 6 and 16 years of age and young people aged 16 and 17 who have left school early to start work. It outlines the role that parents and guardians play in ensuring that their children do not miss out on education and training and also gives information about the National Educational Welfare Board. In addition, the Board launched a new Lo-call telephone number to inform parents and guardians about their legal role and responsibilities under the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000.
- The Board has also moved to provide a service to families who decide to have their children educated in places other than in recognised schools and the first assessments of education provided in such places were recently carried out. Work is also proceeding on the establishment of the register for 16 and 17 year olds who leave school to enter employment.
- During 2004, the Board will be proactively pursuing the return by all 4,000 schools on the levels of school absenteeism. Schools were requested to submit their first returns on student absences by May 2004. Much more comprehensive information on the scale of non-attendance across the school system will be available when these returns are processed.
- The School Completion Programme is designed to deal with issues of both concentrated and regionally dispersed disadvantage and is a key component of our strategy to discriminate positively in favour of children and young people who are at risk of early school leaving.
- Eligible schools were selected on the basis of their retention rates. Schools are grouped into 82 clusters of one or more second-level schools and their major feeder primary schools (400 schools).
- We are currently finalising a detailed review of educational disadvantage schemes. Any decision to expand the School Completion Programme is being considered in the context of this review.

We will establish a new targeted scheme of school meals for disadvantaged pupils which will combine existing schemes and integrate them within other initiatives.

- An enhanced school meals programme was launched in March 2003. The programme has a total allocation of €6.08m. The Programme benefits over 70,000 pupils in 700 schools.
- The Department of Education and Science and the Department of Social and Family Affairs are liaising with a view to further expand the number of schools participating in the programme. Priority is being given to schools participating in existing disadvantaged programmes.

We will ensure that every school building attains set modern standards. This will be achieved through a multi-annual programme, to be called the Schools Modernisation Fund which will be financed through the National Development Finance Agency.

- In 2004, the largest school building programme in the history of the State was published.
- The value of the programme amounts to €88million. It will deliver 260 large-scale projects at primary and post-primary level. 209 of these projects are new starts in 2004.
- In addition, approximately 570 schools will benefit in some way from the capital programme and all 3,300 primary schools will benefit directly from the devolved grants scheme for minor works.

The NDFA will ensure that the maximum appropriate use of PPPs in schools is achieved. To assist this programme, a national assessment and inventory of the condition of school buildings will be completed and regularly updated. Changes will be introduced to the method of delivering building projects in such a way as maximises the level of devolved activity at local level.

- Meetings have taken place with NDFA regarding existing PPPs and any future programme of PPPs.
- Eurostat has re-assessed the accounting implications of PPPs in accordance with the suggestions made by Ireland.
- The education capital envelope for 2004-2008 provides €500m for further PPPs in the education sector for the life of the envelope.
- A devolved building initiative was introduced in the Capital Programme for 2003 for small rural primary schools. Fifty school communities will benefit from this pilot initiative in 2004.
- Delivery on a devolved basis of 299 projects at primary schools and 158 projects at post-primary schools under the innovative Summer Works Scheme.
- A detailed assessment of the pilot phase of the inventory is being undertaken to determine the exact nature and extent of the nationwide survey.

There will also continue to be a separate education capital programme as part of the annual Public Capital Programme.

- Capital programme for 2004 published and capital envelope for the education sector for 2004-2008 now available.

We will establish a national expert advice, oversight and provision service for special needs education by end-2002.

- The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) was established in December 2003. In accordance with the *National Council for Special Education (Establishment) Order, 2003* the Council will fully undertake all of its functions by 1 October 2004.
- The Council has three broad functions. These are to :
 - carry out research and provide expert advice to the Minister on the educational needs of children with disabilities and related services,
 - provide for a range of services at local and national level in order that the education needs of children with disabilities are identified and provided for, and
 - co-ordinate, with health boards, schools and other relevant bodies, the provision of education and related support services to children with disabilities.
- The Council will undertake its direct service delivery function through the deployment of a new grade of Special Education Needs Organisers (SENOs). Up to 80 SENOs will be deployed. The Civil Service and Local Appointments Commission held a competitive recruitment process for this grade. The competition is complete and panels have been formed.
- Assignment to the 18 posts forming the headquarters staff of the NCSE is almost complete.
- The Education for Persons with Disabilities Bill 2003 is currently before the Oireachtas.

We will develop on a North-South basis a Centre of Excellence for study, research and training on special needs and the development and dissemination of best practice models.

- A North-South Centre for Excellence for children with autistic spectrum disorders is being established in Middletown, Co. Armagh. Its services will include: a Learning Support and Assessment Service, a Training and Advisory Service for parents, teachers and other professionals,

and an Autism Research, Dissemination and Information Service.

- The facility is to serve the needs of persons with autism in both jurisdictions. The costs involved will be shared on a 50/50 basis.
- A joint Steering Group comprising health and education authorities north and south has been established to advance the project.
- The property on which the Centre is to be established will be purchased by the middle of 2004 and the Centre will commence operation towards the end of the year.

Over the next five years, we will progressively develop adult education services to a stage where we will offer a “Second Chance Guarantee”. Under the guarantee, every person who left school without completing the junior cycle at second level will be offered the chance to participate on an adult education course.

- We have initiated, with 6,000 places annually, a Back to Education Initiative, involving the use of PLC, pre-Leaving Cert/Junior Cert and VTOS programmes on a part-time basis.
- An objective of the programme is to address the needs of those with minimal or no educational qualifications.

We will continue to support advanced research in third-level institutions and the physical renewal of our third-level campuses.

- New research funding to 15 third level institutions in total, including 6 Institutes of Technology.
- 19 Research Centres completed to date.
- 62 new and expanded research programmes established.
- 40 new inter-institutional programmes/initiatives established.
- Over 4,000 peer reviewed publications to date arising from PRTLTI funded programmes (over 4.5 years).
- A specific allocation of €38 million has been assigned under the Technological Sector Research Initiative (TSR) of the National Development Plan 2000-2006 to support and strengthen the research capabilities of the Institute of Technology sector by enabling institutes to focus on core strengths at both national and individual institute level. This sub-measure comprises three strands – Postgraduate Research and Development Skills Programme €9.8 million, Enterprise Platform Programme €12.4 million and Core Research Strengths Enhancement €15.9 million. In the period 2000-2002 some €9.5 million has been expended to support these research strands in the Institute of Technology sector. In 2003, €7 million was made available in funding for programmes under this initiative.
- The commitment to individual researchers has also been strengthened through increased financial support to the two research councils – Irish Research Council for Humanities and Social Sciences and Irish Research Council for Science, Engineering and Technology.
- A four year (2004-2007) multi-annual programme for Third Level Capital has been compiled.

We support efforts to protect and improve the quality of academic teaching and learning at undergraduate level. We will establish a small expert review group to examine the role of funding in supporting excellence in undergraduate programmes and to consider procedures whereby

outstanding performance by departments, faculties and institutions can be rewarded.

- An independent quality review of Irish universities has been commissioned jointly by the HEA and the Irish Universities Quality Board. The review will be co-ordinated by the European Universities Association and will look at the effectiveness and relevance of internal quality assurance procedures for teaching and learning and the wider aspects of undergraduate academic services to students. It will examine the degree to which their outcomes are used in decision-making and strategic planning and at perceived gaps in internal mechanisms and processes. The review will be completed by the end of 2004.
- The HEA have published a consultation document on a revised recurrent funding model that rewards and incentivises institutions in achieving progress on strategic priorities, including the enhancement of the quality of teaching and learning.

We will seek to address the distortion of the points system which comes about through certain high points courses and, in particular, support the move towards a common science degree as the principal means of entry onto medical, veterinary and other related degree course.

- A Study into alternate methods of entry into Health Science Professional Courses at Third Level was completed and published in September 2003.
- A Working Group on Undergraduate Medical Education and Training was established jointly by the Ministers for Education and Science and Health and Children in September 2003. The Working Group has been asked to consider and make recommendations on detailed implementation issues associated with graduate entry. It is expected to report later this year.
- A preliminary paper examining possible approaches to the development of the proposed programme and identifying relevant associated issues is at an advanced stage of preparation by the HEA.
- Initial discussions have been held in the context of a proposed review of undergraduate medical education.

We will increase the eligibility thresholds for maintenance grants for families with a number of students attending qualifying courses at the same time.

- The 2002 Maintenance Grant Schemes (applicable for the 02/03 academic year) provided for an increase of 15% in the thresholds (for each dependant) where two or more children are in further or higher education.
- In May 2003, the Minister for Education and Science announced a package of measures, costing €42m in a full year, to address the problem of disadvantage in third-level education.
- The Maintenance Grant Schemes provided for an increase of 17% in the maintenance grant in the 2002-2004 period.
- The reckonable income limits were also significantly increased, as was the allowance by which the income limits may be increased for each dependent where two or more children or the candidate's parent are in further or higher education. The increases ranged from 9.5% to 16.3%, well above the normal reference increase in the average industrial wage, 7.6%.
- The increase in the top income limit ensured that a significantly higher number of students would not have to pay the Student Service Charge.
- The top rate of the special rates of maintenance grant (top-up grants) for students from disadvantaged backgrounds was increased to an amount equal to the maximum personal rate of Social Welfare Unemployment Assistance. The number of students benefiting from this grant increased from 3,500 to 10,700.

- The annual income threshold for the top-up grant was increased by 10.8% in 2003 and by a further 6.8% in 2004.

We will introduce the payment of maintenance grants through a unified and flexible grant payment scheme.

- The Department conducted a review of Student Support provisions aimed at ensuring that the benefits of the substantial investment being made are maximised. Some issues required the engagement of external expertise and the ESRI undertook the work.
- The review was published in 2003 and it highlighted the need to examine a more equitable system of means testing and gave fresh impetus to the commitment in the Agreed Programme for Government. Consultations have commenced with various stakeholders in order to progress the matter.

We will ensure that the number of mature students, and students from disadvantaged backgrounds, expands significantly.

- The National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education was established within the HEA and has been fully operational since February 2004. The remit of the National Office will include the promotion of equity of access by mature 'second chance' students and disadvantaged students.
- Arising from improvements in the criteria for the special rates of maintenance grants (top up grants) in 2003 almost 10,000 students qualified for the additional grant for the 2002/2003 academic year.

We will create Donagh O'Malley Scholarships for students from areas of significant disadvantage and in doing so, bring together a number of diverse funding initiatives.

- The remit of the National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education includes the overseeing of the implementation of a co-ordinated framework of measures (a National Programme) to increase participation in higher education by the target groups, including disadvantaged students.

We will implement a series of coordinated initiatives to tackle alcohol abuse by young people.

- The Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) Programme is being delivered in all second-level schools since September 2003.
- The programme contains a module on substance misuse prevention with a particular focus on alcohol.
- Work on developing a similar comprehensive course for all senior cycle students is currently underway at the NCCA.

CRIME

We stand for a society where all people can feel safe in their communities, business and homes.

We will complete the current expansion of the Garda Síochána and increase recruitment so that the numbers will increase by a further 2,000.

- The current actual strength of the Force stands at approximately 12,000 up from 10,800 in 1997.
- We will use the existing capacity of the Garda Training facility in Templemore to bring the strength of the Force to 12,200.

- The Government objective to increase the strength of the Force to 14,000 remains and will be implemented.

These additional Gardai will be targeted at those areas of greatest need, especially areas experiencing a significant drugs problem and a large number of public order offences.

- The enforcement of the law relating to drugs and public order continues to be a key element in the Government Policing Priorities and the Garda Síochána Strategic Goals in the Policing Plan for 2004.
- The Gardai have achieved considerable successes in achieving the drug seizure targets set down in the Government's drug strategy.
- The number of cases of assault causing harm in 2003 was down 21% on 2002 and further progress has been made in 2004 with figures for the first quarter showing a decrease of 18% on the same period last year.

We will examine the potential of the Community Warden service to enforce existing and new functions so ensuring that more trained police officers are released to operational duties tackling crime and defending our citizens.

- A pilot scheme, currently in operation with five local authorities, is due to finish at the end of 2004 and a full evaluation will be taken.

We will extend the use of CCTV cameras and also grant aid local communities to provide them.

- 7 systems are currently in place in Bray, Cork, Dublin (North Central), Dublin (South Central), Dun Laoghaire and Tralee.
- Work on the implementation of Garda CCTV systems in Dundalk, Finglas and Galway is currently ongoing with a view to finalising these systems in 2004.
- A detailed request for tender and technical specification documents for CCTV systems in Athlone, Clondalkin, Tallaght and Waterford will be issued shortly and planning for the installation of a CCTV system in Ballyfermot, Carlow, Castlebar, Clonmel, Ennis, Kilkenny and Sligo is scheduled to commence later this year.
- A significant number of expressions of interest (in excess of 200) in the Community-Based CCTV Scheme have been received. A prospectus has been prepared and a Code of Practice, drawn up in co-operation with the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner, and detailed Technical Specifications, drawn up by An Garda Síochána, are almost complete.

We will review the management structure of the Garda Síochána and we will establish an independent Garda Inspectorate, which will have the power to investigate complaints, and will have the powers of an ombudsman.

- The Garda Síochána Bill 2004 gives effect to proposals made in the review of Performance and Accountability of an Garda Síochána. It will modernise garda management and provides for the establishment of an independent body to be known as the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission.
- The final Garda Strategic Management Initiative Steering Group report has recently been completed.

- The Garda Síochána Bill 2004 was presented to the Seanad on 13 February 2004. It has passed second stage and is currently awaiting Committee Stage.

We will deploy the full weight of the State, including the post-Omagh legislation, against any organisation that seeks to continue the violence of the last 30 years.

- The Garda Síochána continues action against dissident republican groups. The Criminal Justice (Terrorist Offences) Bill, 2002 will strengthen the law for this purpose.

We will target the assets of all persons involved in drug dealing and, in particular, middle-ranking criminals.

- A joint Garda National Drugs Unit/Criminal Assets Bureau initiative has been put in place in relation to targeting the assets of middle ranking criminals involved in drug dealing.

We will continue to target drug dealers at local level by making additional resources available to existing drugs units and for the establishment of similar units in areas of need.

- The Garda Specialist National Units involved either directly or indirectly in tackling drug supply now operate under the direct authority of an Assistant Commissioner, National Support Services.
- A joint Garda National Drugs Unit/Criminal Assets Bureau initiative is now in place which targets local dealers.
- Since the publication of the National Drugs Strategy, Garda resources generally in the fight against illicit drugs have increased, particularly with the creation of some additional Divisional Drug Units.

We will establish a co-ordinating framework for drugs policy in each Garda District, to liaise with the community on drug-related matters and act as a source of information for parents and members of the public.

- A co-ordinating framework linking Garda District, Divisional and National Drug Policing Plans is currently being put in place by the Garda Authorities. The Garda Síochána Bill 2004 makes provisions for the development of Joint Policing Committees at local authority level and for the establishment of local policing fora in designated areas under the umbrella of such committees.
- These bodies are to act as fora where matters relating to local issues of policing and crime, including drug related issues, can be discussed and where strategies and recommendations for dealing with issues locally can be formulated.
- A pilot Community Policing Forum initiative in Dublin's North Inner City has now been positively evaluated and has been approved for mainstreaming from January 2005 in accordance with procedures under the National Drug Strategy. Other such fora are being supported on a pilot basis.

We will ensure that each Garda District and Sub-District be required to produce a Drug Policing Plan to include multi-agency participation in targeting drug dealers.

- The Garda Síochána Policing Plan 2004 targets as a priority, action to significantly reduce the volume of illicit drugs available and reduce access to such drugs.
- Each Garda District and Sub-District's input is now built into their relevant Garda Divisional Policing Plan which includes that Division's Drug Policing element.

We will introduce a Proceeds of Corruption Act modeled on the Proceeds of Crime legislation, to further target white collar crime and corruption in public and private sectors.

- Following consultations with the Office of the Attorney General and the Criminal Assets Bureau, the Proceeds of Crime (Amendment) Bill 1999 will include by way of amendment measures formerly under contemplation for a Proceeds of Corruption Bill.
- Amendments to this end for inclusion in the Bill were published and carried at Committee Stage on 30 June 2004. The Bill is now awaiting Report Stage.

We will complete our programme of modernising prisons and providing extra places, so as to avoid overcrowding and the reopening of the revolving door.

- Two contracted building projects at Limerick and Portlaoise Prisons have been completed. These were the extension of the women's wing / provision of a new male wing in Limerick Prison and the provision of new Army accommodation facilities at Portlaoise Prison. Work on a new Gatelock at the front of Portlaoise has commenced.
- A number of alternative ways of completing the process of modernising the prison estate are being explored. Replacement of the existing Mountjoy and Cork Prison complexes on new sites is proceeding.

We will make full use of the probation service where appropriate as an alternative to custody.

- With regard to implementation of the Children Act 2001, Department of Finance sanction was obtained for additional staff who are currently being recruited. Recruited officers are being deployed to implement relevant sections of the Children Act on a phased basis.
- The Enforcement of Fines Bill which will provide new procedures for the proposed enforcement of fines focusing on alternatives to imprisonment for non-payment is currently under consideration by the Minister.

We will tackle the high level of illiteracy and lack of educational accomplishment prevalent in many prisoners by supporting enhanced educational programmes within prisons.

- Participation in Prison Education continues to be greater than 50% which is high by international standards.
- *Prison Education in Ireland - A Review of the Curriculum* which was published in late April 2004 will inform the future development of the prison education curriculum.
- *The Prison Adult Literacy Survey*, an external review of literacy provision in the prisons, was published in 2003. There is already provision for literacy classes in the prison education curriculum and planning is ongoing to structure literacy provision in line with the survey recommendations.
- *Guidelines for Adult Quality Literacy Work in Prisons* were published in 2003 - the implementation of the guidelines is ongoing.

We will provide skills training courses to enhance employment prospects for prisoners on release.

- The IPS is currently carrying out an internal review of the Work/Training provision with a view to drawing up an action plan aimed at maximising vocational skills training opportunities to enhance employment prospects for prisoners on release.

- The IPS is working in partnership with FETAC to increase the number of work training courses which can be pursued to certification levels.

We will provide for compulsory drugs testing of prisoners where appropriate.

- A new set of Prison Rules, which will make provision for mandatory drug testing is currently with the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel.

We will require convicted drug dealers to register with the Gardaí after leaving prison.

- Work on the preparation of a Drug Offenders Bill which will address the registration of convicted drug dealers with the Gardaí is at a preliminary stage of examination.

We will fully enforce the measures in the licensing laws that ensure mandatory temporary closures of licensed premises - pubs, clubs and off-licenses - where there have been convictions for allowing underage drinking.

- The Intoxicating Liquor Act 2003 has been enacted. It contains provisions to counter drunkenness and disorderly conduct, and to combat underage and binge drinking.
- The relevant law – the Intoxicating Liquor Acts, 2000 and 2003 and the Public Order Act, 2003, which created similar sanctions for other premises – is being implemented by the Garda Síochána. The decision to impose closure of premises is one for the courts.

We will enact the Criminal Justice (Public Order Enforcement) Bill, 2002 as a priority.

- The Criminal Justice (Public Order) Act 2003 came into operation with effect from 28 June 2003.

We will guarantee funding of Victim Support as a cornerstone of Government policy in victim care and review existing funding levels in the light of proposed reviews.

- We made provision for a contribution to the administrative and training costs of Victim Support by way of an allocation of funds from the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform's Vote (2003-€1.077m; 2004- €1.029m).

We will ensure that any changes to the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme will involve consultation with Victim Support and we will examine the feasibility of recompensing crime victims for injuries and non-insured loss. An agency will be designated to recover fines for this purpose.

- A review of the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme has commenced and initial discussions have been held with Victim Support as to their recommendations for changes to the existing Scheme.
- In addition, an EU Council Directive on compensation to crime victims has been finalised. The finalisation of the review, however, is held up pending the outcome of a Court action in relation to Article 10 of the existing Scheme.

As part of a general reform of the courts system, the existing criminal jurisdiction of the Circuit Criminal Court and the Central Criminal Court will be merged in one nation-wide indictable crimes court of which all Circuit Court judges and High Court judges will be members.

- We are considering the issue in the context of the Report of the Working Group on the Jurisdiction of the Courts.

We will extend the power to the DPP to appeal against lenient sentences in serious cases before the District Court.

- This matter was referred by the Attorney General to the Law Reform Commission for consideration as a matter of urgent public interest.
- The LRC has, in recent weeks, issued a Consultation Paper in which it provisionally recommended that a procedure be introduced into Irish law for appealing against unduly lenient sentences imposed in the District Court. The LRC is now in the process of taking submissions on this Consultation Paper with a view to issuing a final Report.

We will ensure all substantive criminal law will be codified into a single Crimes Act, dealing with homicide, violence, property offences, dishonesty, corruption, public order, arrest, criminal procedure and court jurisdiction, uniform sentencing procedure and policies, defences such as insanity and incapacity.

- The Expert Group appointed to advise on possible approaches to codification submitted its Report to the Minister at the end of June. This Report will be published in August.

We will publish this criminal code and ensure it is kept up to date by means of the Statute Law Restatement legislation now before the Oireachtas.

- See above.

We will introduce night courts and weekend courts in areas of greatest need.

- Experience of the operation of court sittings on Saturdays and special sittings during the week in Dublin continues to be reviewed. Changes in the law to make such sittings more effective are also being considered.

We will ensure annual funding for awareness programmes to tackle domestic violence and ensure that housing and shelter programmes fully address the needs of those who have experienced domestic violence.

- The National Steering Committee on Violence Against Women, which is chaired by the Minister of State at the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform recently conducted an awareness campaign in relation to Domestic Violence, focusing on "Unmasking the Abusers".
- The sub-committee is currently considering further awareness initiatives. These campaigns are funded from Subhead R of the Vote of the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform.

OLDER PEOPLE

One of our core objectives will be to help all older people to live in the dignity which their immense contribution to the development of our country deserves. Building on our record of unprecedented increases in pension payments and support services, we will implement a coordinated programme of measures so that the full range of issues of concern to older people are addressed. In order to reflect the breadth of this commitment, specific measures can be found as core elements of the different sections of this programme, and, in particular, in the sections dealing with pensions and health.

PENSIONS

We will increase the basic state pension to at least €200 by 2007.

- Old age pensioners received a €10 increase in Budget 2004.
- The maximum rate of the Old Age Contributory Pension now stands at €167.30 and the Old Age Non-Contributory Pension now stands at €154.00

We will introduce personal pension entitlement for pensioner spouses currently in receipt of the qualified adult allowance, set at the level of a full old age non-contributory pension.

- Progress towards this target will be made over the period to 2007. A number of special increases were granted in recent Budgets. Also new pensioner couples now have the option of having the Qualified Adult Allowance paid directly to the spouse.

We will implement improvements in the Widow's/Widower's Pension.

- Contributory Widow(er)s aged over 66 received a special increase of €1.50 per week in Budget 2004, thereby completing the commitment to bring the rate of this payment up to the level of Old Age Contributory/Retirement Pensions. In addition, the Widowed Parent Grant, a once-off payment to all widow/ers with children, was also increased in Budget 2004 by €200 to €700.

We will remove the requirement whereby a person reaching 65 must first retire for a period before being able to work and retain a portion of their pension.

- The implications of the proposal are being considered in the context of the review of the qualifying conditions for contributory and retirement pensions which will be published later this year.

We will establish a group to report on options for lower income groups to ensure that they can have an earnings-related pension when they retire.

- This issue will be progressed in the light of the review of the effectiveness of the recently introduced PRSAs.

We will maintain the National Pension Reserve Fund and the payment of 1% of GNP per annum into the Fund

- This commitment is being delivered.

CHILDREN AND CHILDCARE

We believe there is much still to be done in order to help all children to develop to their full potential.

We are committed to moving forward on the basis of implementing our highly ambitious Children's Strategy.

- In late 2002, the National Children's Office [NCO] prepared the first comprehensive progress report since the launch of the National Children's Strategy for the Cabinet Committee on Children.
- The report outlined the progress made under all 135 actions in the Strategy and it was based on information received from the relevant government departments.
- At that stage, work was underway or good progress had been made on 91% of all the actions in the Strategy.

- During the past year the National Children's Office has made significant progress in the area of children's and young people's participation (Goal 1 of the Strategy) and in research on children's lives (Goal 2 of the Strategy).

We will work to ensure that the number of children living in consistent poverty is reduced in line with the National Anti-Poverty Strategy.

- Strategies to address child poverty and the measures to give effect to them are set out in the revised National Anti-Poverty Strategy, the National Children's Strategy and, more recently, in the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion.
- The overall target is to reduce the number of children who are consistently poor to below 2% by 2007 and, if possible, to eliminate consistent poverty amongst children by then.
- Significant progress has already been made towards achieving this target. For instance, the number of children who are consistently poor has more than halved in the four year period 1997 to 2001, falling from 15.3% in 1997 to 6.5% in 2001.
- One of the key means of achieving a reduction in child poverty lies in reducing the numbers of parents who are unemployed. The current low rates of unemployment, especially long term unemployment, and the very significant increases in the numbers in employment, have undoubtedly contributed to the reduction in the level of consistent poverty amongst children. The aim must be to continue to maintain high levels of employment and to remove obstacles to taking up employment especially in the case of lone parents and parents with large families.
- The importance of tackling child poverty is reflected in 'Ending Child Poverty' has been identified as one of ten special initiatives being undertaken under Sustaining Progress.
- The Office for Social Inclusion in the Department of Social and Family Affairs has lead responsibility for co ordinating this initiative. It is working closely with the National Children's Office, relevant Government Departments, the Combat Poverty Agency and the Social Partners in developing and implementing a multi dimensional policy response.
- At the end of April 2004, the National Children's Office, working with the Department of Social and Family Affairs, issued a request for tenders for a Children's Longitudinal Study that will examine the progress and well being of children at critical periods from birth to adulthood. Further analysis will be undertaken to address obstacles to employment, with particular reference to lone parents, in the light of NESC research and the OECD report on family friendly policies.

We will complete our announced programme of multi-annual increases in child benefit and ensure that the combined value of child support is increased in line with our commitment under the NAPS.

- In Budget 2004, the rates of child benefit were increased by €6/€8, thereby making further progress towards the achievement of the Government commitment.

We will develop a National Play and Recreation policy which will aim to ensure that all children have access to at least a minimum standard of play and recreation.

- *Ready, Steady, Play: A National Play Policy* was launched on 8th March, 2004
- The play policy is aimed principally at children up to and including primary school age, and the 52 actions set out in that policy relate to that age group. However, the general principles

relating to play are relevant to all children up to 18, and the policy should be read in that context.

- The national play policy is multi-faceted, addressing a wide range of issues for which local authorities have responsibility, including green space provision, housing estate design, safe walkways and cycleways. In this regard, there is a strong focus in the Policy on the issue of play facilities, particularly in relation to equipped playgrounds.
- At the launch of the Play Policy, we announced a €1m Local Authority Playground Grants Scheme for the development or refurbishment of playgrounds. The scheme requires matching funding from Local Authorities, and is being administered by the NCO in conjunction with the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. We also announced funding of €0.5m for play in healthcare settings, including €50,000 to each of the three paediatric hospitals.
- The NCO is currently working on a recreation policy for children aged between 12 and 18. It is anticipated that this will be finalised in early 2005.

We will establish the Office of the Children's Ombudsman and have the office fully operational during 2002.

- Following an innovative recruitment process involving children and young people, Ms. Emily Logan, previously Director of Nursing at Tallaght Hospital, was selected as the first Ombudsman for Children.
- Ms. Logan took up duty in March of this year and is currently working to establish her office. She intends to consult with children and young people on all aspects of her work.

We will publish independent evaluations of all child welfare services.

- The Social Services Inspectorate (SSI) will in the future monitor all personal social services operated by the Health Boards, but initially it concentrates on the child care area, in particular on the inspection of health board operated residential child care and on piloting the inspection of foster care services.
- Legislation and standards are in place against which inspections are made.
- The SSI publish an annual report which reports to the Minister on the findings from inspections and informs health boards, other bodies involved in the provision of services for children and young people and the public of the standard of care in children's residential centres.

We will fully implement the Children First guidelines for the prevention, identification, reporting, assessment, treatment and management of child abuse in all its forms.

- The Children First guidelines are now policy in all health boards and are continuing to be implemented.
- 126 *Children First* staff are now in place.
- Health board multi disciplinary training has been given to core staff in health boards and further training is ongoing.
- Joint garda/health board training is ongoing, following joint Train the Trainers training.
- Health Board staff have co-ordinated with the Department of Education and Science regarding information sessions/training of Primary School Designated Officers.

- Information and Advice Officers have commenced their work with the voluntary sector.
- Guidelines for the voluntary sector – *Duty to Care (April 2002)* – have been developed to provide easily accessible material for organisations who want to develop their own procedures. These guidelines form the basis of the work being done by Information and Advice Officers in the Health Boards.
- In co-operation with us, guidelines for the Youth Work sector for primary schools and for sporting organisations have been developed and are being implemented by the relevant bodies with involvement of the health boards as necessary. The development of Secondary level guidelines and procedures is also ongoing with health board support.
- It is our intention to hold an independent review in 2004 to evaluate the process of implementation of the guidelines and to ensure that they are being implemented consistently across the boards.

We will ensure that the National Study of Children is fully established and that the information generated will be widely disseminated.

- Request for Tenders (RFT) for proposals to undertake the National Longitudinal Study Of Children in the Republic Of Ireland have now been issued. The closing date for receipt of proposals will be Friday, 27th August 2004.

We will strengthen the parental leave scheme in line with the recommendations of the social partners.

- We are committed under *Sustaining Progress* to strengthening the Parental Leave Scheme in line with the agreed recommendations of the social partners arising from the Working Group on Parental Leave.
- This will require amending primary legislation to provide for a range of improvements as detailed in *Sustaining Progress*. The Government is committed to having this legislation enacted before Summer, 2005.

We will ensure that every county implements a Childcare Strategy by the end of 2002, providing the planning and funding basis to significantly increase childcare provision.

- All 33 County/City Childcare Committees are now implementing their Five Year County Childcare Strategies to develop childcare provision within their local area.
- This is being achieved through the delivery of their Annual Action Plans in respect of which they are receiving almost €7 million of funding annually under the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme 2000 - 2006.

We will seek to significantly expand the number of new childcare places supported by state funding.

- The NDP/CSF supported Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme 2000 - 2006 is the key instrument to develop childcare in Ireland. The funding provision for the Programme has increased to €46 million (from €36.7 million) following the Mid Term Review of the National Development Plan.
- Funding is available for capital developments, towards staffing costs for childcare facilities targeting disadvantage and also to enhance quality of childcare places throughout Ireland.

We will significantly increase capital grants for community and private childcare facilities.

- Community based not for profit groups can avail of funding of 100 per cent for the development and enhancement of projects, subject to funding availability.
- The amount available to private providers is capped at €50,790 per facility and a maximum of €100,000 to a single provider operating a number of settings to ensure compliance with EU competition rules.

We will seek to streamline the application process for childcare capital grants and increase the grant limits for all providers, subject to overall compliance with EU State Aid rules.

- A review of the applications process was undertaken in the context of the Interim Evaluation and Mid Term Review of the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme. The City/County Childcare Committees have been asked to assist grant applicants in the preparation of their funding applications.

We will ensure that there is a network of supports in place for child minders.

- County/City Childcare Committees receive ongoing funding to initiate actions to establish training, networking and information for childminders.
- We announced a new initiative for childminders in November 2003 which makes a small grant available to childminders who participate in a short Quality Awareness Programme. An amount of €2.8 million is being made available for this initiative in 2004.

We will introduce a special working visa scheme for child minders.

- The timing and modalities of such a visa being introduced are being advanced interdepartmentally and in the context of the overall labour market situation.

We will keep under review and seek to streamline regulations concerning the establishment and running of crèches and childcare facilities, including planning requirements, consistent with health and safety requirements.

- A review of the Child Care (Pre-School Services) Regulations 1996 and (Amendment) Regulations 1997 has been completed and a revised draft of the Regulations is at an advanced stage.

We will expand support for the provision of out-of- hours childcare programmes based in schools.

- The Working Group on School Age Childcare has recently completed its policy recommendations for the development of an improved provision of childcare for school children outside of school hours.
- We will shortly undertake a preliminary consultation process on the implementation of the recommendations to ensure that the roll out of the recommendations meets with a positive response from the childcare and education sectors.

Disability and Caring

We are committed to building service provision and legislative frameworks which enable people with disabilities to fulfil their potential and make a full contribution to the economic and social life of our country.

We will complete the programme of expansion of appropriate care places for people with disabilities with, in particular, the ending of the inappropriate use of psychiatric hospitals for persons with intellectual disabilities.

- The number of persons with an intellectual disability accommodated in psychiatric hospitals in May 2003 was 438, down from 490 in April 2002. The figure in 1996 was 970. The target for this service is that by 2006 patients with a disability will be transferred from psychiatric hospitals.
- Between 1999 and 2002 additional revenue funding of €10.48m and €27.4m capital was allocated to the programme to provide more appropriate care.
- Examples of developments include the transfer of over 60 persons in the Mid Western Health Board from St Joseph's Hospital, Limerick and Our Lady's Ennis, 29 persons from St Finan's, Killarney, 21 persons from St Canice's, Kilkenny and 30 persons from St Joseph's Service, St Ita's, Portrane.
- Other centres, apart from psychiatric hospitals, which have received revenue and capital funding include St Raphael's, Youghal, St John of God House, Enniscorthy, Alvernia Centre, Portlaoise, St Peter's Castlepollard, Lough Sheever, Mullingar, Sean O'Hare Unit, Stranorlar, Cloonamahon, Sligo and Aras Attracta, Swinford.

We will complete consultations on the Disabilities Bill and will bring the amended Bill through the Oireachtas and include provisions for rights of assessment, appeals, provision and enforcement.

- The Expert Consultation Team appointed by the Government to oversee the consultation process, met with and received the views of stakeholders including the Disability Legislation Consultation Group before completing its task in February, 2003.
- Since July, 2003, the DLCG has had a number of meetings with members of the Government and with officials in relation to the Bill, the latest as recently as 19th May 2004.
- Given the complex and cross cutting nature of the issues involved in the Bill, the Government has referred oversight of the preparation of the Bill to the Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion.
- The Bill is at an advanced stage of preparation and will be published as soon as the Government has completed its work.

We will following further consultations, enact the Education (People with Disabilities) Bill and establish as a matter of priority a new dedicated Special Needs Education Council with independent assessment, appeals and redress mechanisms.

- The Bill contains provisions for independent assessment, appeals and redress. Pending enactment of the legislation, the National Council for Special Education has been established by Order under the Education Act.
- Provision for children with special needs will be co-ordinated and enhanced through the National Council for Special Education.
- With effect from September 2004, 350 additional teaching posts are being provided to cater for special needs pupils at primary level.

We will ensure the regular publication of national data on employment for people with disabilities.

- In light of the commitment in the last Social Partnership Agreement, the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness, the Department of Finance in consultation with the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and the Civil Service and Local Appointments Commission, commissioned a study on the career progression of people with a disability in the Civil Service. The research was published in May 2004.

We will increase funding for the full range of open and supported training and employment schemes for people with disabilities.

- Our objective of maximising the overall effectiveness and efficiency in the delivery of programmes and services for people with disabilities was further pursued in the past year with the completion of a major consultancy review of vocational training provision for people with disabilities.
- The purpose of the review was to examine the delivery of vocational training for people with disabilities through various forms of provision funded by FAS, and to identify areas where efficiencies and effectiveness could be improved.
- In the light of a separate consultancy review carried out on behalf of FÁS, new criteria for the provision of Supported Employment services were introduced in 2003.
- Expenditure on Employability Schemes and Integration Supports increased by €1.196m to a total of €2.058 in 2003.
- As a key contribution towards promoting the employment theme of the European Year of People with Disabilities, a series of five regional awareness-raising conferences were held in Cork, Galway, Limerick, Sligo and Waterford in 2003.

We will establish a National Centre for Universal Design to serve as a leader in promoting universal access.

- To be provided for in the Disability Bill - see above

We will complete the development of the National Centre for the Visually Impaired.

- Planning for the National Centre is continuing in consultation with interested parties. The nature of the project is changing arising out of the increasing number of visually impaired students who have opted for education, with additional supports, in mainstream schools.

We will complete the work of the group examining the introduction of a costs of disability payment.

- The Working Group on the feasibility of introducing a Cost of Disability Payment, as established under the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness, is currently operating under the aegis of the Department of Health and Children.
- At the request of the Working Group the National Disability Authority have commissioned a research project that, inter-alia, examined the issue of the additional costs associated with having a disability. The results of this project have been published by the National Disability Authority and are now being considered by the Working Group.

We will introduce a new Home Subvention scheme to maximise support to those needing full time care in the community

- The Eastern Regional Health Authority and the health boards have been piloting Home Care Grant Schemes as an alternative to long-term residential care to assist older people living at home in the community. Older people who are being discharged from the acute hospital system and those living in the community are being targeted under these schemes.
- These projects have recently been evaluated and the reports of these evaluations will be available shortly. Home Care Grant Schemes have or are about to be piloted on a number of other health boards.
- In July 2003 funding of €5.5 million was made available to the Eastern Regional Health Authority and the Southern Health Board under the Bed Capacity Initiative to purchase private nursing home beds for older people who were inappropriately being cared for in beds in acute hospitals. Funding of €17.6 million has been provided in 2004 for this initiative.
- Approximately 269 older people benefited from this initiative in the Eastern Regional Health Authority in 2003 with a further 89 to date in 2004. To date 270 people have benefited from this initiative in the Southern Health Board area. These people have been accommodated in the private nursing home sector through enhanced nursing home subvention payments as well as moving back home with increased community supports, including home care grants.
- In 2004 additional funding of €1.25 million was provided to the Eastern Regional Health Authority and the health boards for Personal Care Packages for older people, including home care grants. This funding will enable the Authority and the health boards to support older people in their own homes who would otherwise have to move into long-stay residential accommodation.

We will expand the income limits for the carer's allowance so that all those on average incomes can qualify.

- In Budget 2004, the income disregards were increased by €40 per week for single people and €80 for couples bringing the disregards to €250/500 respectively.
- These income disregards will continue to be examined in the context of future budgets.

We will implement significant increases in the value of the respite grant for carers.

- In Budget 2004, the respite grant was increased by €100 to €335.

We will consult on other options for assisting families who may wish to make long-term provision for a person with a disability.

- We are in regular consultation with the representative bodies in the disability field and these consultations include consideration of the full range of health related support services required by people with disabilities.
- An additional €25 million in current expenditure was made available in 2004 for services for people with disabilities bringing the total funding since 1997 to €643 million.
- This Government is committed to provide the necessary support services to enable people with disabilities to achieve their full potential. The ongoing development of these services will remain one of our priorities.

We will legislate for the achievement of the employment quota for people with disabilities in the civil and public service.

- To be provided for in the Disability Bill – see above.

SUPPORTING DIVERSITY AND TOLERANCE

We will work to support greater respect for the person and for diversity, equality and cultural difference in Ireland.

We will uphold the entitlement of all people to equal treatment before the law.

- The Employment Equality Act 1998 and the Equal Status Act 2000 which prohibit discrimination in the workplace and in the area of services, have been amended to give effect to EU Equality Directives 2000/43/EC, 2000/78/EC and 2002/73/EC.
- Legislation to give effect to the amendments, the Equality Bill 2004, was passed by both houses of the Oireachtas on the 7th July, 2004.

We will undertake an annual review of the Anti-Racism campaign in order to identify new avenues to combat racism.

- The KNOW Racism Programme, which ran from 2001 to end of 2003 is currently being evaluated.

We will complete a review of the laws on incitement to hatred and ensure that people who incite racial hatred have no place in Irish society.

- The review which is underway will be completed when an EU Draft Framework Decision on combating Racism and Xenophobia has been finalised.

We will enhance the excellent work which is currently underway in our schools, to educate for diversity and promote tolerance.

- The Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) programmes at primary and post primary level, and the Civic Social and Political Education (CSPE) programme at second level, are designed to prepare students for participatory citizenship, to develop the skills of critical appraisal and decision-making based on human rights and social responsibilities, and to promote a respect for human dignity, tolerance for the values and beliefs of others, and a celebration of diversity. SPHE is a mandatory part of junior cycle programmes since September 2003.

We will appoint an expert group on managing cultural change to advise Government on strategic issues and integrated approach to this complex issue.

- The National Action Plan against Racism, for which widespread consultation took place, is currently being finalised and will take these issues into account.

We will review campaigns designed to promote tolerance and understanding between the settled and travelling communities and maintain multi-annual funding for targeted programmes.

- The follow up to Citizen Traveller is still under consideration. The Traveller Monitoring Committee's Second Progress Report will inform these deliberations further. Due to the complex

nature of this issue it is expected that a seminar will be held, with Traveller organisations and relevant Government Departments, to explore the issues involved.

ASYLUM AND IMMIGRATION

We recognise that asylum is a complex, long-term issue that requires action at national, European and international levels. Within these contexts, we will work in a balanced way.

We will seek to increase the rate of repatriation of failed asylum applicants, whose applications have been processed to finality, in order to maintain the integrity of asylum policy.

- The number of Deportation Orders issued increased from 946 in 2000 to 2411 in 2003.
- The number of Deportation Orders effected increased from 187 in 2000 to 590 in 2003.
- In 2004, up to 30 June, 1,466 Deportation Orders were signed of which 321 were effected. In addition, 126 transfer orders under the EU Dublin II Regulation have been signed for the transfer of asylum applicants to other EU States which are responsible for processing their asylum claims.

We will ensure that the Reception & Integration Agency works effectively to fulfil its mandate.

- The RIA continues to develop and enhance its operations to ensure that the reception and accommodation needs of asylum seekers are met and that refugees are supported in integrating into Irish society. It also continues to promote and develop cross-Department/Agency supports for reception, accommodation and integration needs of asylum seekers and refugees.
- The RIA keeps its portfolio of accommodation for asylum seekers under review to ensure that high standards are maintained through regular accommodation inspections by the RIA and by independent consultants. Accommodation requirements continue to be met for all newly-arrived asylum seekers.
- The RIA has continued to coordinate the provision of services including health and welfare to ensure that changing needs are met (including the development of an outreach maternity service for asylum seekers in Dublin).
- As part of RIA's contribution to an overall policy on integration, it is involved in contributing to the development of the National Action Plan Against Racism which will have a significant integration dimension. The RIA emphasis will be on how best it can support, facilitate and co-ordinate the integration of refugees and those given leave to remain.
- The RIA continues to resettle Ireland's annual quota of programme refugees under the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Resettlement Programme. In that connection, the RIA is currently working with the Finnish Ministry of Labour on the MORE Project which is targeted to develop, in transnational co-operation, comprehensive resettlement models, which can be used in EU Member States.

We will ensure that new asylum applicants are dealt with within six months and that other applications which are currently outstanding can be dealt with quickly.

- The Immigration Act 2003, which commenced on 15 September 2003, contains a number of important provisions aimed at streamlining the asylum process and speeding up processing. For example, these provide for the designation of safe countries of origin with appeals in such cases without an oral hearing and the prioritisation of applications on the basis, for example, of type of caseload. This Act also includes carrier liability provisions which together with the other provisions in the Act have had a significant impact on the reduction in asylum numbers.

- Since 15 September 2003 new applications which are the subject of a Ministerial Prioritisation Directive are being scheduled for interview four working weeks from the date of application with a decision issued in under 1-2 weeks of the interview. Applications and appeals in the prioritised/accelerated procedure can be processed in a time period of some 3 months.
- The number of asylum applications in Ireland in 2003 (7,900) showed a 32% reduction when compared to 2002 (11,634). There has been a 52% reduction in asylum applications for the last 6 months of 2003 as compared with the same period in 2002. This trend has continued in the first six months of 2004 with a reduction of some 50% in the number of asylum applications received when compared to the same period in 2003.
- Processing is moving strongly with the number of cases on hand in the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner (ORAC) at end June 2004 down by some 30% since the end of 2003. The number of applications awaiting processing in the asylum system at end June 2004 was 2,219 which compares with 6,500 cases over six months old at the end of September 2001.

We will keep under review the number of applications from non-nationals to remain in the State on the basis of parentage of an Irish-born child and initiate all-party discussions on the issue of such constitutional or other measures which might be required.

- During 2003, the Cabinet Committee on Asylum and Immigration and the Government were kept informed of developments on this issue. On 23 January 2003 the Supreme Court ruled in favour of the State on the cases of L&O, finding that the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform was entitled to deport the parents of an Irish born child following a consideration of the circumstances in each case.
- In July 2003 a strategy for the handling of claims for leave to remain in the State from the parents of Irish born children was brought to Government. A new unit to process these cases was established in late 2003 with staff being levied from other Departments to deal with the workload of some 11,000 cases.
- Following a review of the situation in the light of the Government strategy, proposals were made for constitutional change to address the underlying issue. In March 2004 the Government decided to hold a referendum on the amendment to the citizenship provision in the Constitution. The referendum took place on 11 June 2004 and was overwhelmingly carried.
- Work is proceeding on finalising the text of a Bill amending present citizenship legislation following the acceptance by the People of the Referendum proposal.

We will work with the International Office of Migration to devise a voluntary repatriation programme for illegal immigrants.

- During 2002 a pilot voluntary return programme was operated by the IOM which resulted in 114 persons returning voluntarily to their countries of origin. A review of that programme was carried out and a number of improvements were implemented.
- On 1 November 2003, three voluntary return programmes aimed at specific groups were announced. These programmes will run for a limited period and are additional to the existing General Return Programme. The first programme is part of the Government's strategy for the handling of claims for leave to remain in the State from the parents of Irish born children. This programme will provide return and reintegration assistance to participants who applied by the end of March 2004. The second programme which runs for one year provides return and reintegration assistance to irregular migrants under the age of eighteen who arrive unaccompanied in the State. The aim of the third programme is to assist 50 unaccompanied minors living in Ireland to return to their country of origin. The minors may be asylum seekers or irregular migrants and the programme will have regard to the best interests of the child.

- During 2003, 401 individuals returned to their country of origin under voluntary return programmes operated by the IOM. To date, approximately 753 persons have participated in these programmes.
- In 2004 to 30 June, 239 individuals have returned under these programmes.

We will prepare a new Immigration and Residence Bill which will consolidate legislation in the area and provide for future developments.

- During 2003, the Immigration Act 2003 was enacted. It introduced carriers liability and amended certain elements of the Refugee Act 1996.
- A High Court judgement in January 2004 had the effect of rendering many of the legislative provisions relating to immigration controls inoperable. The Immigration Act 2004 was drafted and enacted as an emergency measure in February 2004 in order to give a statutory basis for immigration controls.
- Work is continuing on the development of policy requirements for the proposed Immigration and Residence legislation.

We will review processing arrangements for work visas, including greater integration of consular and commercial reviews to ensure both speedy processing and reasonable safeguards.

- Our work related visa issuance policy is flexible and coheres with the broad needs of the Irish economy and society subject to reasonable safeguards.
- Work related visa application determinations have already been delegated to the Department of Foreign Affairs for implementation through its network of consular posts abroad.
- During 2003 wide ranging proposals for the development of the visa system including proposals for the computerisation and for the provision of additional resources for the development of the system were brought to Government.
- Work is underway in co-operation on the computerisation of the system. Additional funding has been made available from the increase in visa fees introduced from 1 March 2004.

We will ensure that effective monitoring of the working conditions of all persons with work visas.

- The Labour Inspectorate of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment is responsible for monitoring certain employment conditions for all categories of workers in Ireland. Inspectors pursue allegations of worker mistreatment and when evidence of non-compliance with the relevant employment rights legislation is found, the Inspectorate seeks redress for the individual/s concerned and, if appropriate, a prosecution is initiated.
- We have brought out a new series of information leaflets, in nine languages, about employment rights legislation in Ireland. The languages covered are Chinese, Czech, Hungarian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Polish, Portuguese (Brazilian form), Romanian, and Russian.

Through our Overseas Development Aid programme, we will work to support the development of countries experiencing large-scale economic migration.

- Through our country programmes in sub-Saharan Africa and other interventions in other parts of Africa, the Development Cooperation Ireland programme is being used to support the development of countries experiencing large-scale economic migration. In Nigeria, for example, we are

working with NGOs and missionaries to deliver assistance in the areas of community development, micro-finance, agriculture, water and sanitation.

- The assistance we provide in our seven country programmes and in many other countries in Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe is designed, inter alia, to promote political and economic stability in these countries, thereby reducing incentives for economic migration.
- In addition, our humanitarian budget is used to help countries in crisis or coming out of crisis and a key objective is to prevent population displacement.

EQUALITY & LAW REFORM

We will publish regular reviews of the operation of equality legislation and ensure that the enforcement authorities are in a position to effectively carry out their duties.

- The Employment Equality Act 1998 and the Equal Status Act 2000 which prohibit discrimination in the workplace and in the area of services, are being amended to give effect to EU equality Directives 2000/43/EC, 2000/78/EC and 2002/73/EC. Legislation to give effect to the amendments, the Equality Bill 2004 has passed both Houses of the Oireachtas.

We will ensure that each public sector entity implements a structured programme to address imbalances in gender representation in management positions.

- Implementation of the Gender Equality Policy for the Civil Service is progressing. Research on women in the IT sector in the Civil Service was commissioned during 2003 and the first draft report should be available shortly.
- In addition, the proportion of women in Assistant Principal grades increased from 27 per cent in June 2000 to 31 per cent in June 2003. (The Government target is 33 per cent by 2005).

We will ensure that life-long learning policies are responsive to the needs of women and, in particular, ensure that qualifications authorities fulfill their mandates to develop appropriate mechanisms to recognising alternative modes of progression.

- Women represent 72% of students on Post Leaving Certificate courses, 69% of participants in the Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme, in excess of 60% of adult literacy students, 50% of participants in the Youthreach programme and 82% of trainees in Traveller Training Centres.
- The flexibility of the part-time Back to Education Initiative arises from the needs of women. The target groups of the initiative include those not in work but not eligible to be on the Live Register, disadvantaged women and lone parents and others with caring responsibilities that may prohibit their participation in full time courses. 75% of participants in the initiative are women.
- An objective of the Education Equality Initiative in the Further Education area is the targeting of groups undergoing educational disadvantage, including women's groups.
- The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland launched the National Framework of Qualifications, and the associated policies on access, transfer and progression for learners, in October 2003. The arrangements for the implementation of the framework in higher education have been announced by the Authority and awarding bodies, and take effect in Autumn 2004. Further education and training awards will be brought into the framework by Autumn 2004. The policies on access, transfer and progression are being considered by providers of education and training and are being implemented. The aim is that increased progression opportunities will be brought about in this way.

We will ensure that a minimum of 40% of state board nominations are from each gender.

- Six-monthly reports have been presented to Government for each of the six-monthly periods 1 July 2002 to 31 December 2002 and 1 January 2003 to 30 June 2003.
- The reports presented show an overall increase in women on State Boards to 30% of total membership and that Ministerial appointments of women to State Boards were either close to, or at, the Government's gender balance target of 40% for the periods under review.

We will seek to introduce a scheme of mandatory mediation for the purpose of improving the early settlement of claims and controlling legal and other costs. We include within this sanctions for unreasonable conduct by either side.

- The Civil Liability and Courts Bill 2004 provides for a system of mediation.

We will introduce measures to punish the presentation and making of false and exaggerated claims in personal injury cases. As part of this, we will create a power for the courts to deduct from damages costs relating to exaggerated claims.

- This is provided for in the Civil Liability and Courts Bill 2004. The Bill provides that the plaintiff must swear an affidavit verifying the details of his/her claim and that, where any element of a claim is made in bad faith, the whole claim will fail.

We will, in the context of a statutory Press Council and improved privacy laws, move to implement reforms of libel laws designed to bring them into line with those of other states.

- The Report of the Legal Advisory Group on Defamation was published in June 2003. Subsequently, we initiated a public consultation process which ended on 31 January 2004.
- The public consultation process will assist towards the formation of a reasonable consensus on this issue and it is intended to bring proposals to Government in late 2004.

New laws will be introduced to speed up civil litigation.

- The Civil Liability and Courts Bill 2004 will speed up civil litigation.
- Also, the Committee on Court Practice and Procedure is examining all aspects of practice and procedure relating to personal injuries litigation.

We will change the in camera rule in family law cases to allow for general reporting of overall trends while continuing to respect the privacy of all those involved.

- The Civil Liability and Courts Bill 2004 provides for the amendment of the 'in camera' rule so as to allow for the publication of reports of proceedings provided that a report does not include any information which would identify the parties, or any child, to which the proceedings relate.

We will reorganise the High Court into specialist divisions.

- A specialist Commercial Court is now in operation.

We will legislate to provide effective remedies for complaints about judicial misbehaviour, including lay participation in the investigation of complaints.

- The Scheme of a Bill is in development and the expectation is that the Bill will be published in the second half of 2004.

A comprehensive reform of the law relating to charities will be enacted to ensure accountability and to protect against abuse of charitable status and fraud.

- Concrete, focussed action is being taken for the first time in over 40 years. With regard to the key principles set out in the Government White Paper on Regulating Better, the regulatory process is being developed in the public interest, in such a way as to reduce the potential for fraud and abuse (thus making the legislation a significant anti-crime measure) and to add value to the charities sector.
- As a first step, and in accordance with the undertaking in Sustaining Progress to prepare regulation in a fully transparent way that maximised public participation in its formulation, the Government-approved Consultation Paper on Establishing a Modern Statutory Framework for Charities was issued in December 2003. The public consultation process launched in February 2004 has been completed.

TACKLING DRUG ABUSE

The fight against drugs is one of the great challenges of the modern world and it one where we believe major progress can be achieved.

We will continue to prioritise heroin and cocaine for intervention, and will publish separate national targets for supply reduction for each major type of drug.

- The National Drugs Strategy 2001 - 2008 provides for objectives and key performance indicators in the area of drug supply reduction. A key indicator in the Strategy is to increase the volume of opiates and all other drugs seized by 25% by end of 2004 and by 50% by end 2008, using 2000 seizures as a base.

We will ensure that regional drugs task forces operate efficiently to ensure that prevention programmes are active in all areas of the country.

- The 10 Regional Drug Task Forces have been established.
- The RDTF are currently working on mapping out the patterns of drug misuse in the area, as well as services, including prevention, already available, with a view to co-ordinating these existing services and addressing gaps in service provision.
- Their plans are expected to become operational from mid-2005.

We will ensure that an early-warning system, involving all key agencies, is in place to track the potential spread of heroin into new areas.

- The National Advisory Committee on Drugs are developing proposals to track trends in the use of illicit drugs of all types across the country.

We will publish annual reports of activity and progress towards the achievement of specific prevention, supply reduction and treatment targets.

- Under the National Drugs Strategy, the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs publishes such reports.

Additional Gardai will be concentrated in the areas experiencing the greatest drugs problems and the activities of middle-ranking dealers will be targeted.

- The authorised maximum strength of the Garda Síochána was increased last year from 12,000 to 12,200, an all time record level of strength.
- The Garda Commissioner will deploy additional resources to meet operational demands, including demands in the area of drugs.
- A joint Garda National Drugs Unit/Criminal Assets Bureau initiative has been put in place in relation to targeting the assets of middle ranking criminals involved in drug dealing.

Treatment and rehabilitation, including residential programmes, will be expanded so that there is a place available for every person seeking the service.

- The National Drugs Strategy 2001-2008 contains 100 actions, a number of which relate to the development of treatment and rehabilitation services.
- The Strategy provides for immediate access for drug misusers to professional assessment and counselling, followed by commencement of treatment as deemed appropriate, not later than one month after assessment.
- Health boards are continuing to work on the implementation of this action and direct access to counselling and assessment is in place, especially in larger urban centres.
- There has been an increase in the numbers of general practitioners and pharmacists involved in the delivery of drug treatment. At the end of March 2004, there were 309 general practitioners and 298 pharmacists participating in the scheme. In addition, the target to increase the number of treatment places for opiate addiction to 6,500 by end of 2002 has been exceeded. At the end of March 2004 there were 6902 people registered on the Central Treatment List.

By end-2002 we will publish a plan to completely end all heroin use in Irish prisons. This will include the availability of treatment and rehabilitation for all who need them and the introduction of compulsory drug testing for prisoners where necessary.

- The draft Prison Drugs Policy currently being considered includes provision for treatment, rehabilitation and mandatory drug testing.
- Measures continue to be taken to reduce supply, for example, searching procedures, physical security including nets over exercise yards, CCTV in visiting rooms and new visitor procedures.

Where a person has been found to be involved in the supply of drugs to a prisoner we will introduce a new stiffer penalty.

- Work on the preparation of a Drug Offenders Bill which will address this issue is at a preliminary stage of examination.

As part of the new regional education management structures, local supports will be provided and new guidelines will be issued to all schools on the implementation of a drugs policy.

- In October 2002, we issued guidelines in booklet form to all primary and post-primary schools to assist them in the development of substance use policies as required under Action 43 of the National Drugs Strategy 2001 to 2008.
- The problem of substance misuse among young people is of the most pressing concern and education is a central plank of the Government's approach as set out in the National Drugs Strategy. The school substance use policy is an essential prerequisite for ensuring that schools have a coherent framework for providing appropriate education and dealing with relevant issues in a planned and considered way.
- As part of a programme of structural reform initiated by the Department of Education and Science, eight Regional Offices have been established to date and a further two are due to be established before the end of 2004. Personnel from these offices will represent the Department on the Regional Drugs Task Forces and, where relevant, on the Local Drugs Task Forces. Appointments have been made by the Department to six of the ten Regional Drugs Task Forces and the remaining four appointments will be made by the end of 2004.

REGENERATING DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES

We will develop the RAPID initiative in our most disadvantaged communities as a priority programme. When the small areas data is made available from the latest census we will review the areas covered and consider additional areas for inclusion.

- We are continuing to promote the RAPID initiative as a priority programme.
- The RAPID Programme currently targets 45 areas of disadvantage throughout the country and the operation of the Programme continues to be kept under review.
- An allocation of €4.5 million is being provided in the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs in 2004 to support small-scale local projects in RAPID areas, through co-funding with the relevant Department/Agency.
- In addition, the Community Development Programme has proactively targeted the most disadvantaged communities for the establishment of projects. There are presently 175 Community Development projects throughout the country.
- Under the Dormant Accounts plan funding is ring-fenced for RAPID areas.

We will continue the Young People's Facilities and Services Fund (YPFSF) and complete a comprehensive survey of the availability of recreation facilities in disadvantaged areas.

- The total commitment to the YPFSF for 2003 was over €16 million.
- The National Assessment Committee are still considering a number of options in relation to the future operation of the YPFSF.

We will ensure that the remedial works scheme is focused on bringing older elements of the local authority housing stock set up to modern standards.

- We are continuing to promote remedial works/regeneration projects which have a focus on older local authority estates.
- Under the Remedial Works Scheme, local authorities have been requested to target older run down estates and approval has been given for works to be carried out on a number of older estates countrywide including O'Malley Park and St. Mary's Park in Limerick, Knocknaheeny and The Glen in Cork and Clonard Park in Waterford.
- In addition to area regeneration projects and the redevelopment of inner city flat complexes, a comprehensive redevelopment of the Ballymun estate is being undertaken. This includes the demolition of existing flat blocks and their replacement with low rise housing, as part of an integrated strategy for the social, economic and physical renewal of the area (2,820 new houses to be provided).
- Exchequer funding of €16million is being provided for the Remedial Works Scheme in 2004. This figure is being supplemented by almost €10.8million of local authorities internal capital receipts from the proceeds of sale of local authority houses. A further €33.8million is being provided for major regeneration projects in local authority housing areas.

We will ensure local authority developments of over 75 units have a dedicated childcare facility.

- Local authorities, when constructing new social housing developments are encouraged to provide appropriate community facilities including creche facilities. Such facilities are usually funded as part of the capital cost of the project.
- €2.5million is being provided for the provision of childcare facilities in local authority estates in 2004.

The Education Welfare Board will publish an action plan on school attendance and early school-leaving for each area covered by the RAPID Programme.

- The National Educational Welfare Board has contacted all primary and post primary schools requesting an attendance report for the school year 2003/04. This will provide comprehensive data on the levels of non-attendance by pupils.
- The data are essential for the planning of the development of the national educational welfare service and for the development of services/programmes designed to address non-attendance.
- Following an analysis of the data, the Board will give priority to the publication of an action plan on school attendance and early school leaving for each area covered by the RAPID programme

Each relevant Government Department will allocate specific staff whose principal duty will be to ensure that the Department is effectively engaged with the RAPID communities along the lines of the final report of the Integrated Services Process.

- Following discussions between the Department of Community Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs and other relevant Departments in late 2002 regarding progress being made under the RAPID Programme, there was an acceptance that the necessary staff are in place.

We will ensure that the strategic plans of the City and County Development Boards are, where appropriate, effectively targeting the areas of greatest need.

- The County/City Development Boards (CDBs), representative of local government, local development, state agencies and social partners at local level are now implementing their strategies via their member agencies.
- The Strategies contain a strong emphasis on social inclusion.
- The CDBs' social inclusion co-ordinating working groups (representative of relevant public and local development bodies) are pursuing better co-ordination of social inclusion activity locally, including in relation to the RAPID programme.

Each Department will publish, as part of its annual report, a statement of the work undertaken to support Integrated Services work in these areas.

- The Department of Community Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs is liaising with other Departments in relation to this commitment.

We will ensure democratic legitimacy on local boards appointed to implement development programmes.

- Strengthening the democratic accountability of agencies and service providers in this area is one of the key principles underlying a package of initiatives that has been agreed by Ministers.
- Consistent with this principle and in order to support greater coherence at local level and better co-ordination of services, community and local development agencies are being asked to submit their business plans to City/County Development Boards for consideration and endorsement.
- This arrangement will apply to Area Partnerships, Community Development Projects, RAPID Groups, Child Care Committees and LEADER Groups.

SUPPORTING CIVIC LIFE

GOOD GOVERNMENT

We believe that it is a core part of the work of all elements of the public sector to ensure that it works in the public interest effectively and informed by the highest personal standards.

Integrity in Public Life

We will vigorously implement and improve where necessary the full range of ethics legislation.

- In July 2002 we approved a framework for the application of the Ethics Acts (i.e. the *Ethics in Public Office Act 1995 and the Standards in Public Office Act 2001*) to directorships and positions of employment in all appropriate public bodies.
- We are in the process of implementing that decision with a view to prescribing, by regulation, all appropriate public bodies under each Department's aegis and to designating directorships and all appropriate positions of employment.
- The Standards in Public Office Act 2001 requires Codes of Conduct to be put in place for Office Holders, Members of the Houses and Public Servants. A code for Civil Servants has been significantly progressed while consultations are ongoing with the Standards in Public Office Commission regarding the optimum design and content of codes of conduct for public servants.
- A Code of Conduct for Office Holders was drawn up by the Government and published by the Standards in Public Office Commission (SIPOC) in July 2003.

- A comprehensive updated ethics framework for councillors and local government employees, under the Local Government Act came into operation in January 2003. This legislation is supported by Codes of Conduct which are being issued to all councillors and local authorities.

We will introduce a Proceeds of Corruption Act modeled on the Proceeds of Crime legislation, to further target white collar crime and corruption in public and private sectors.

- White collar crime and corruption in the public and private sectors are being targeted in the Proceeds of Crime (Amendment) Bill.
- Following consultations with the Office of the Attorney General and the Criminal Assets Bureau, the Proceeds of Crime (Amendment) Bill 1999 will include by way of amendment measures formerly under contemplation for a Proceeds of Corruption Bill.
- Committee Stage of the Bill was completed on 30 June 2004 and the Bill is now awaiting Report Stage.

Delivering Value for Money

We will build a greater culture of review of public spending by publishing regular evaluations of key spending programmes. As part of this, each Department will publish key indicators for each major programme against which progress will be assessed.

- Under the Expenditure Review Initiative (ERI) currently in operation Departments/Offices are required to analyse in a systematic manner what is being achieved by Exchequer spending.
- Departments are required each year to review for their efficiency and effectiveness a number of programmes that involve major policy issues or significant levels of expenditure. It is a requirement of the process that suitable performance indicators to support programme evaluation are identified and that the reviews must be subjected to external quality assurance and published.
- The Government have decided that maximum use will be made of data which will become available under new Management Information Framework (MIF) systems in Departments. They have accordingly required all Departments/Offices to establish cross-Divisional Groups to further develop performance indicators for their organisations.
- New guidelines for Departments/Offices for the appraisal and management of capital programmes and projects will also be published later this year which will help to ensure that better value for money is obtained in the development and delivery of capital projects.

The National Development Finance Agency will ensure that public projects are developed to maximise value for money.

- Departments are ensuring, with the expert assistance of NDFA in relation to assessing optimal financing options and evaluation of financial risks, that major public projects are developed to maximise value for money.

eGovernment

We will put in place a programme to implement a major expansion in the range and quality of online Government services.

- The Government-established REACH Agency is concentrating with Departments and agencies on the development of services for online delivery, in keeping with the aim of having services online by 2005. REACH have compiled a wider index of over 900 services spanning information, forms, online and interactive services currently featured on public sector websites in Ireland.

- In April 2004, the Government published the 2nd progress report on New Connections, its Action Plan for the development of the Information Society.
- 7 Pilot projects (as part of the role-out of the Mobhaile initiative) are being supported by Government through the Information Society Fund.

We will ensure that all public services capable of electronic delivery are available through a single point of contact.

- The REACH Agency has selected a preferred supplier for the design and build of the Public Services Broker. The aim is to have the Broker put in place this year.

Proven Partnership

We will seek to negotiate a new partnership agreement to follow the PPF and ensure that it recognises that partnership must embrace organisational change, agree ways of improving the delivery of public services and provide for the modernisation of our workplaces.

- The negotiations on the successor Agreement to the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness (PPF) concluded in February 2003 and each of the four Social Partner Pillars have since formally ratified the current Agreement *Sustaining Progress*.
- It has been accepted by the parties to the Agreement that the rapid pace of change in the business environment demands ongoing adaptation and the parties are committed to full co-operation with normal ongoing change and the need for continued adaptation and flexibility to maintain and improve competitiveness and to increase productivity and employment.
- The Programme for Public Service Modernisation set out in Part Two of Sustaining Progress deepens the process of quality public service delivery, by ensuring a greater focus on outcomes and securing value for money.
- Following the mid-term review, which will include a review of the ten Special Initiatives contained in Part One of *Sustaining Progress*, the provisions of the Agreement in regard to the modernisation of work practices and ongoing change and flexibility will continue to apply.

We will review models of participation in the social partnership process and in particular examine ways of maximising both the efficiency of the process and the potential contribution of the diverse and vibrant community and voluntary sectors. This will include greater participation of pensioners through groups such as the Senior Citizens Parliament.

- In the context of the review, a number of organisations applied for inclusion in the social partnership process.
- Following this review, we decided to invite seven organisations, including the Irish Senior Citizen's Parliament to join social partnership.
- This is the first time there has been such a substantial change to the composition of an individual Pillar. The new organisations that have been included in the Community and Voluntary Pillar represent a wide spectrum of interests which will no doubt strengthen the diversity of the Pillar.

Semi State Sector

We are committed to ensuring that the commercial semi-State sector provides services of world-class quality at a competitive price to the consumer.

- We have set out clear policy directives and shareholder mandates in Departmental Strategy Statements which allows the sector operate in a competitive environment where the delivery of world-class services at competitiveness prices is necessary.

We will seek to secure a viable long-term future for State companies without ideological preconceptions.

- The commercial State companies, as the drivers of sustainable economic growth across many sectors, have a key contribution to make in positioning Ireland for long term success in terms of prosperity, competitiveness and social cohesion.
- The Programme for Government must be seen as continuing and building on the commitments in "Action Programme for the Millennium" (June 1997) in which we undertook to adopt a pragmatic approach towards the commercial State companies. In the period since then, it can be seen that this approach has borne fruit.
- In that period the commercial State companies have successfully weathered many challenges. The opening of their traditionally closed markets, in which they functioned as monopoly providers, has invigorated them and has even provided the stimulus for expansion while ensuring that the customer has benefited from competition.
- In tandem with the opening of markets, we have ensured that the interests of the consumer are protected through the establishment of independent sectoral regulators.
- We have ensured that the corporate governance of the commercial State companies conforms to internationally accepted best practice through the implementation of the "Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies".

We will approach the issue of the most appropriate form of ownership or structure for State companies on a case-by-case basis.

- The capital needs of State companies in the new competitive environment can no longer be satisfied by recourse to public funds. EU competition policy lays down that the provision of capital by the State has to be on strictly commercial grounds. Therefore we have set up a framework whereby new sources of investment for development or expansion can be accessed.
- Strategic Alliances, Public/Private Partnerships, Employees shareholding and flotations open up the possibility of both sourcing capital and entering new markets.
- Where possible, partnerships between public and private investors have been encouraged while, however, acknowledging the importance of examining proposed partnerships to ensure that the terms of any such agreements are more cost effective than traditional direct funding approaches.

We will ensure that public enterprise is managed in the spirit of social partnership, with a new view to achieving optimum service delivery and value for the public.

- In the Agreement *Sustaining Progress* the Government has committed to ensuring that the commercial semi-State sector provides services of world-class quality at competitive prices to the consumer.
- In progressing this commitment, we are committed to active engagement with the social partners.

We will support the maximum commercial freedom of semi-State companies, subject to the fulfilment of national strategic and balanced regional policy objectives.

- Our policy has been based on enabling the commercial State Bodies to be competitive and cost-effective as providers of vital public services to the benefit of the consumer.
- This is set firmly in the national policy context which sees social and economic objectives as mutually reinforcing.
- We have given each of the State companies clear policy directives and shareholder mandates as expressed in the Statement of Strategy, within which they can then operate in a manner that does not detract from their commercial freedom nor disadvantage them in the competitive environment to which they are now exposed.

Dáil and Local Government Reform

We will implement our proposals for Dáil reform.

- In February 2004, the Government announced a wide-ranging group of proposals for Dáil Reform. These proposals seek to dramatically increase relevancy and efficacy of the Dáil. Increasing sitting hours, facilitating more in-depth debate, incorporating greater use of technology and strengthening the profile of committees will ensure a more efficient, transparent and ultimately modern parliament. Dáil reform can only be implemented with the cooperation of opposition parties.

We will continue the process of local government reform.

- A review of the Strategic Policy Committee (SPC) system in local authorities was carried out by the Institute of Public Administration in consultation with representatives of all involved i.e. elected members, sectoral representatives, the social partners and local authority officials. The recommendations set out in the review will now be implemented with a view to enhancing the operation of the new SPCs currently being established in each city/county local authority.
- Better co-ordination of delivery of public and local development services at local level is being pursued by County and City Development Boards (CDBs), including in the context of the Government decision of 4 February 2004 to improve local and community development programmes. The Boards have also published their strategies for economic, social and cultural development and implementation is underway.
- A major independent review of Local Government Funding is underway and is due to be completed in Spring 2005.
- A new local authority financial management system (FMS) with full accruals accounting and a management information system has been rolled out to all local authorities.
- A new management structure with Directors of Service responsible for the main functions (Housing, Planning Etc.) is now in place.
- Increased emphasis by local authorities on customer service; including customer action plans, service indicators, one-stop shops, an initiatives fund and a pilot community warden service. Also, guidelines will be available to local authorities by the end of 2004 on customer surveys, customer consultation and complaints and appeals systems.
- Intranets and related systems have been installed within and between local authorities and specific applications have been developed for functions such as planning, housing, roads and also management support. There has also been significant development of intranet based business and interaction with local authority customers.
- The ending of the dual mandate under the Local Government (No. 2) Act 2003 further strengthens local government. It has benefits for the national parliament and for local government, and provides the freedom and the focus for each to concentrate on their respective roles.

Electoral Participation

We will examine ways of engaging the electorate in the democratic process with a view towards increasing participation and turnout.

- We will continue to examine and address legislative and administrative barriers to voter registration and voting, building on the provisions of the Electoral (Amendment) Act 2001 and the Referendum Act 2001, which were used for the first time in 2002 and were also in operation at the European and local elections and citizenship referendum in June 2004.
- An extensive education and awareness campaign was undertaken prior to the 2004 polls. The campaign involved radio and newspaper advertising and extensive outdoor postering. For the first time, a simple step-by-step guide to voting was used and the early opening of polling stations at 7.00 am was given significant prominence. The annual voter registration campaign will be undertaken in 2004 for the 2005/2006 register, supported by local campaigns.

BETTER FACILITIES FOR SPORT AND RECREATION

We believe that sport and leisure can play a major role in personal, community and general development and are committed to seeking to develop it all levels.

We will continue to invest in sports facilities around the country through the National Lottery and Exchequer funding, particularly at local level where clubs of all codes, run by volunteers, remain the backbone of Irish sport.

- Since 1998, grants to the value of €21 million have been awarded to 4,250 projects.
- 1304 applications for funding under the 2004 Sports Capital Programme were received and grants totalling €50.8m towards the development of 717 projects throughout the country have now been announced. Further allocations under the 2004 Programme will be made shortly.

We will complete a national audit of local sports facilities and put in place a long-term strategic plan to ensure the development of such necessary facilities throughout the country.

- The first step in meeting this commitment is being finalised with a review of our sports capital programme under an Expenditure Review programme which is nearing completion.
- On the completion of the Expenditure Review, an inter-agency steering group will be established to oversee the preparation of a long-term strategy for the development of sporting facilities.
- It is proposed that this steering group will also oversee the commencement of the proposed national audit of local sports facilities.

We will start work on the construction of a world-class national stadium.

- **We will build facilities, both locally and nationally, which will serve the needs of the sporting bodies both nationally and locally.**
- **The Minister for Sport, in conjunction with CSID, the national sporting bodies and the Office of Public Works will bring forward the plans and implementation proposals of these policies in the most cost effective way as soon as possible.**

- On 27 January 2004 the Government decided to provide funding of €191million to the joint IRFU/FAI project for the redevelopment of Lansdowne Road Stadium as a 50,000 seat stadium. The total cost of the project will be €292 million (including VAT and inflation). The IRFU and FAI will jointly provide €101 million towards the project.

- A Steering Group has been established to advance the Lansdowne Road Stadium Project. Its membership comprises representatives of the IRFU, the FAI, the Departments of Arts, Sport and Tourism and Finance and the Office of Public Works.
- A special purpose vehicle, the Lansdowne Road Stadium Development Company Ltd has been established to develop the facility. A Project Leader to direct the redevelopment work is being recruited by the sports bodies.
- On 27 January 2004 the Government also agreed to proceed with the development of a sports campus at Abbotstown.
- Campus and Stadium Ireland Development Ltd, (CSID) has been given responsibility for planning and overseeing the programme of development. The process of consultation with the various interested parties, in particular the National Governing Bodies of Sport has commenced and the Minister expects to receive the outline proposals for the campus from CSID by the autumn.
- The National Aquatic Centre, the flagship of the campus at Abbotstown, opened in 2003, and successfully hosted the swimming events of the 2003 Special Olympics World Summer Games in June and the European Short Course Championships in December 2003.

We will work with local authorities to provide at municipal level a range of public facilities such as swimming pools, gymnasias and synthetic, floodlit playing pitches.

- The Sport Capital programme provides an opportunity for sporting organisations and Local Authorities to submit an application for funding in respect of the provision of sporting facilities.
- Under the 2003 Sports Capital Programme grants to the value of €6.5m were allocated to 10 municipal projects involving local authorities. To date, under the 2004 programme €3.2m has been awarded to 39 local authority projects. Further announcements under the Programme will shortly be made in respect of funding for projects of major significance which, while meeting local needs, will also add considerably to the national and regional sporting infrastructure which is required both for increasing levels of participation and improving standards of performance.
- Under the Local Authority Swimming Pool Programme, since 2000, 55 applications for grant-aid have been or are being managed. Of the 55, grant-aid has been approved towards the costs of 18 projects with 37 other projects at various stages of the process; 6 are at tender stage; 16 are at contract document stage and 15 are at preliminary report stage. This year's estimate provision of €15 million is a 67% increase on the provision of €9 million for 2003.

We will continue to support the implementation of the High Performance Strategy and in particular, its short-term aim of improving Ireland's team performance at the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens.

- The Sydney Review has provided guidance for the various stakeholders in the preparation of our Olympic and Paralympic teams as the Athens 2004 Olympics draws near. The Irish Sports Council has been working effectively with the Olympic Council of Ireland, the Paralympic Council of Ireland, the National Governing Bodies of Sport and the National Coaching and Training Centre to ensure that the Olympic and Paralympic teams will be the best prepared teams ever to represent Ireland at Olympic and Paralympic Games.
- Over €10 million has been allocated by the Irish Sports Council in 2003 and 2004 on the implementation of its High Performance Strategy, including the Athens Enhancement Programme which supports the employment of 17 professional staff, including 6 Performance Directors in targeted sports.
- The Olympic Council of Ireland has been allocated €650,000 for administration and Athens related programmes, especially the pre-Olympic Training Camps in Cyprus and Croatia. The Paralympic

Council is receiving €506,000 for team preparations, training camps and participation at the Games.

- Ireland's elite competitors and development squads received over €4.3m in grants under the International Carding Scheme in 2003 and 2004.

Following a review of the operation of the existing Local Sports Partnerships, we will support their establishment throughout the country as quickly as possible.

- An interim review of the operation of the existing partnerships was carried out by the Irish Sports Council and following our consideration of the review, four new partnerships were approved subject to the carrying out of an independent appraisal on the programme's impact on local sport in 2004.
- The total number of Local Sports Partnerships around the country is now sixteen.

We will continue to encourage voluntarism in Irish Sport and we will recognise, on a national platform the contribution of individual local volunteers by setting up National Volunteer Awards on the lines of the Gaisce Awards.

- The substantial increase in funding provided by the Government (€13m in 2000 to €30.75m in 2004) has enabled the Irish Sports Council to develop a wide range of programmes and initiatives to support activities and to help build capacity in what is predominately a voluntary sector.
- The Sports Council has been engaged in extensive training programmes in the areas of management, human resources, governance, administration and strategic planning for volunteers in sports organisations. The recently opened new accommodation for the smaller governing bodies of sport, Sport HQ, will also be an important factor in the further development of the organisations and the volunteers who run them.
- These developments and the experience gained from the various training initiatives for volunteers will help inform the development of an appropriate awards scheme, in consultation with the Irish Sports Council.

We will create, under the Local Government Fund, a new Community Facilities Fund which will support the development of community facilities not covered by existing schemes.

- Work has commenced on drawing up a new long-term strategic plan for the provision of sports facilities throughout the country.
- As part of this process, a national audit of local sports facilities will be carried out.
- The question of a new Community Facilities Fund will be progressed in the context of the review, the subsequent audit and in consultation with the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

CULTURE AND HERITAGE

Our aim is to ensure that cultural activity is available and accessible to all.

We will develop and sustain the increased level of activity in the arts round the country, through the Arts Council, and otherwise in accordance with statutory provisions.

and,

We will support the implementation of the Third Arts Plan. As part of this we will work to ensure that the Council has the appropriate professional staffing structures.

- A new Arts Council was appointed in 2003. It has reviewed the targets set out in the Third Arts Plan against the background of increased financial stringency and has decided on its own initiative to undertake an intensive examination of its current goals and priorities which will at the one time take account of current budgetary realities and also address the needs of artists, arts organisations and the general public.
- Although the severe budgetary pressures experienced in 2003 necessitated that funding for the Arts Council should be curtailed in common with that for most public sector agencies in that year, significantly increased funding was allocated in 2004 bringing the allocation up to an all-time high level of €2.5 million, or about 20% above the 2003 figure.
- The authorised staffing complement of the Arts Council was increased by the order of 30% over recent years.

We will enact a new Arts Act, the first in over fifty years, to provide a more inclusive definition of the Arts and map out, on a statutory basis, a new relationship between artists, the Council and the Minister.

- The Bill was enacted on 14th August 2003.

We will implement the National Heritage Plan.

- Each Government Department and all other bodies responsible for the implementation of the Plan were notified by letter of the Actions they were responsible for soon after the Plan was published.
- Progress reports on implementation of the Plan are now being correlated.
- Other actions contained in the Plan are also being implemented, including the revision and consolidation of the National Monuments Acts, a review of the Heritage Act, 1995 which provides the statutory basis for the Heritage Council and the adoption and implementation of a National Biodiversity Plan.
- Steps are being taken to enable the State to accede to and ratify the Hague Convention on the Protection of Cultural Property in the event of Armed Conflict.

We will develop measures, in partnership with local authorities, to protect and strengthen areas of Georgian built heritage that surround the core Georgian areas of Dublin and other centres.

- Dublin City Council are proactively using the new measures in Part IV of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 to protect valuable structures and architectural conservation areas through their new development plan for the city, including providing that O'Connell Street is an area of special planning control. We will continue to support local authorities in this regard.

We will develop maximum North-South cooperation directly and through the relevant agencies, in recognition of common interests and a largely shared culture.

- Cooperation in relation to the arts has been achieved through the two Arts Councils on this island for the last 30 years and is an important reflection of our commitment to North-South cooperation.

We will help develop the music industry in Ireland through the Music Board.

- The Strategic Plan of the interim Music Board has been launched.

We will ensure the early establishment of the Irish Academy for the Performing Arts under the aegis of the Department of Education and Science.

- Responsibility for the concept of an Irish Academy for the Performing Arts has been reassigned to the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism to be progressed as resources and other priorities permit.

We will rebuild the Abbey, our National Theatre

- All options for rebuilding the Abbey Theatre either at its existing location or elsewhere in Dublin city centre are currently being evaluated with a view to having a decision taken on the long-term future of the theatre in this, its centenary year if at all possible.

We will consider with urgency the recommendations that will be made by the recently established Forum on Broadcasting.

- This commitment has now been met. A Programme of radical public service broadcasting reform is now being put in place.
- To date these include;
 - the publication of a Statement of Programme Commitments for 2003,
 - the publication of a Code of Fair Trading Practice,
 - an Audience Council is to be announced very shortly,
 - RTE has agreed to appoint a process auditor to its Independent Production Unit,
 - Publication of the RTE Charter,
 - The first annual review of the level of television licence fee took place in December 2003 and provided for an increase of about half of the prevailing rate of inflation.
- Further new legislation is required to give effect to the remaining elements of the Government decision of December 2002 (the restructuring of RTE and the establishment of a Broadcasting Authority of Ireland as the single regulator for all Irish broadcasters). The legislation will be published later this year.

We will continue to support the development of Irish language broadcasting. In line with legislation which we have already enacted, we will establish TG4 as a separate statutory body.

- Under the new RTE Charter it must reflect the bilingual nature of Irish society and actively support the use of the Irish language in everyday life through the production of suitable programming.
- As a result of our Reform of Public Service Broadcasting, RTE has undertaken to increase the amount of Irish language programming.
- Through the Broadcasting Act 2001 we provided the legislative base for separation.
- Proposals will be brought forward shortly to give effect to the commitment to the establishment of TG4 as an independent statutory entity.

We will finalise the long-term strategic development of the National Concert Hall.

- OPW and the National Concert Hall have prepared a detailed and costed brief for its future development at its present location. This is being examined at present and will shortly be submitted to Government for decision.

We will support the Irish film industry and the central role of the restructured Irish Film Board.

- We remain committed to the development of a strong and dynamic Irish film sector and, most importantly, to fostering strong indigenous production with the Irish Film Board having a strategic role in that context.
- This has been demonstrated by the restructuring of the Board. The financial resources available to the Board have increased from a total of €5.256million in 1997 to €1.845 million in 2004.
- The staffing complement of the Board has risen from four in 1997 to sixteen in 2003.
- The Section 481 tax relief is now secure until December 2008, with the annual amount that can be raised increasing to €5m from 2005.

THE IRISH LANGUAGE AND THE GAELTACHT

We will use the report of the Gaeltacht Commission – An Coimisiún faoin nGaeilge sa Ghaeltacht - as the basis for future policy.

- Considerable progress has been made in implementing the recommendations of the Commission, designed to strengthen Irish as the principal community language in the Gaeltacht.
- Initiatives in hand at present include :
 - the carrying out of a major linguistic study on the use of Irish in the Gaeltacht, as a basis for the linguistic development of the Gaeltacht and a review of its boundaries,
 - a language awareness campaign aimed at encouraging parents and prospective parents in the Gaeltacht to choose Irish as the principal language of the household,
 - the implementation of a language planning initiative in Gaeltacht areas in conjunction with locally-based community organizations.

A West Coast Digital Corridor will be developed to provide high-quality broadband telecommunications facilities for both Gaeltacht and non-Gaeltacht communities from Donegal to Cork. Údarás na Gaeltachta will be charged with facilitating the provision of similar facilities in any Gaeltacht areas not covered by the Corridor, where demand exists, including offshore islands.

- The Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources and an tÚdarás continue to pursue the development of the telecommunications network.

We have concluded framework deals with ESB and ESAT BT broadband backhaul providers to radically improve the economic case for providing broadband in the west.

- The Esat BT deal involves an ultrahigh-speed product and leverages the investment made by the Government and Esat BT in its regional fibre network in recent years, including the significant investment made in the Western Digital Corridor.

We will enact the Official Languages Equality Bill.

- The Official Languages Act 2003 was signed into law in July 2003. Since then significant progress has been achieved in relation to the implementation, on a phased basis, of the provisions of the Act, including:
 - Publication in December 2003 of an action plan for implementation and making of a Commencement Order on 19 January 2004 to give effect to most of the provisions of the Act,
 - Establishment of the Office of Coimisinéir na dTeangacha Oifigiúla and appointment of Mr. Seán Ó Cuirreáin as An Coimisinéir Teanga in February 2004,
 - Making of the first seven Placenames Orders under the Act to date.
- Work on Statutory guidelines and regulations under the Act is at an advanced stage.

Scéim Labhairt na Gaeilge will be fully reviewed in the context of modern day needs, and ways as to how to promote the Irish language among young people will be examined.

- The review of Scéim Labhairt na Gaeilge is nearing completion and it is expected that a new scheme will be introduced from January 2005.
- Issues regarding the promotion of Irish among young people are being examined by the Advisory Committee established to propose recommendations for action arising from the Report of the Gaeltacht Commission.

Youth and sports funding schemes will be reviewed in the context of their impact in the Gaeltacht and Islands.

- An analysis of our Schemes relating to the Gaeltacht and the Islands is under way at present.
- An independent review of the Gaeltacht Summer Camp Scheme has been completed. A revised scheme has been agreed and will be in operation this summer.

An Foras will be requested to develop materials specifically for families who wish to raise their children through the medium of Irish.

- Foras na Gaeilge have funded the development of a handbook in association with Comhluadar on rearing children through Irish. In addition, Foras na Gaeilge, in association with Comhluadar and TG4, funded the production of three videos relating to rearing children through Irish.

The major works programme for Gaeltacht infrastructure under the National Development Plan will be completed.

- This works programme, which includes strategic roads and piers in the Gaeltacht, is proceeding satisfactorily.
- A provision of almost €10m has been made for Gaeltacht infrastructure improvement schemes in 2004.

A comprehensive study of the current status of the language in the Irish media will be undertaken.

- See the commitment regarding TG4 in Culture and Heritage section of this document.
- As part of our reforms of Public Service Broadcasting, RTE's Statement of Commitments commits RTE to increasing the amount of Irish and bilingual programming.

- The RTÉ Charter specifies that RTE must reflect the bilingual nature of Irish society and actively support the use of the Irish language in everyday life through the production of suitable programming
- We have enacted legislation aimed at providing 5% of the television license fee for the Public Service Broadcasting Fund to develop additional public service programming including Irish language programming.

The Language Assistant scheme in Gaeltacht schools will be strengthened and expanded to include co-operation with parents in the home.

- An independent review of this scheme has been completed. It is anticipated that a revised scheme will be in operation for the school year 2004-05.

A comprehensive review of the needs of all Gaelscoileanna and Gaeltacht schools will be undertaken. As part of the work of the Department of Education & Science, the physical condition of all buildings used by these schools will be reviewed and a programme put in place to ensure that they meet required standards.

- The issue of reviewing the needs of Gaelscoileanna and Gaeltacht schools was also examined by the Advisory Committee established to propose recommendations for action arising from the Report of the Gaeltacht Commission.
- A Strategic Plan has been drawn up by Gaelscoileanna, which is funded by Foras na Gaeilge. A development officer has been appointed by Gaelscoileanna and is engaged in consultation with local groups.
- Bilateral meetings with the Department of Education and Science take place as necessary in order to assist with the coordination and development of activities in the Gaeltacht.

The development of the Gaeltacht infrastructure will continue through the schemes operated by the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs and Údarás na Gaeltachta.

- Funding continued in this area, with expenditure of €4.4 million in 2003 on housing in the Gaeltacht and an additional €1.9 million on other Gaeltacht infrastructure, including minor roads, marine works, community halls, Irish colleges and recreational facilities.
- Furthermore, an additional €1.39m was spent in 2003 on infrastructure projects for the Gaeltacht islands of Inishbiggle, Inishboffin (Donegal) and Tory.
- A committee established between the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs and Údarás na Gaeltachta continues to follow up on the recommendations of an independent review of the infrastructure needs of the Gaeltacht.

The improvements carried out under the strategic roads scheme will continue, to ensure that the road infrastructure in remoter areas of the Gaeltacht will be improved and that there is at least one good road into every Gaeltacht area.

- This scheme is continuing in partnership with the relevant local authorities and the programme of works is well on target.
- An allocation of some €5m will be spent on Gaeltacht roads in 2004.

The relevant national schemes will be reviewed to ensure that appropriate supports are in place for the Irish language childcare sector throughout the country.

- This matter was examined by the Advisory Committee established to propose recommendations for action arising from the Report of the Gaeltacht Commission, in the context of reviews conducted by Foras na Gaeilge and Údarás na Gaeltachta.
- Údarás na Gaeltachta intends to establish Comhar na Naíonraí Gaeltachta, which will oversee a restructuring of the provision of Irish language childcare services within the Gaeltacht. Foras na Gaeilge, in conjunction with Forbairt Naíonraí Teoranta, is reviewing the provision of such services in areas outside the Gaeltacht.

A strategic review will be completed in relation to the employment support work of Údarás na Gaeltachta with a view to identifying new strands of employment creation in Gaeltacht areas.

- Significant progress has been made on the recommendations of the Report of the Working Group on Employment Creation in the Gaeltacht (December 2002) including, inter alia;
 - the Implementation Committee established to tackle the unemployment problem in the Gaith Dobhair area has set an employment target of 200 new jobs per annum for the Gaith Dobhair Business Park - to date 185 new jobs have been created and 274 new jobs have been approved,
 - an energetic marketing campaign has been initiated to attract investment from the services sector to the Gaith Dobhair area,
 - a joint venture has been put in place between Údarás and National University of Ireland, Galway to invest €2 million for the development of a third level educational facility and a resource for a modern internationally traded services company,
 - in co-operation with its parent Department and other relevant agencies, Údarás continues to develop and upgrade the telecommunications and physical infrastructure of Gaeltacht areas,
 - new training and educational initiatives are being promoted in order to assist upskilling and retraining of the labour market,
 - and
 - a greater emphasis is being placed on the natural and indigenous resources of the Gaeltacht, including the Irish language.

We will support the development of Irish medium 3rd level education and research activities on campus and, where appropriate and sustainable, in Gaeltacht education centres.

- Financial assistance, in excess of €1 million over a three-year period has been provided by the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs towards the establishment of Acadamh na hOllscolaíochta Gaeilge, National University of Ireland, Galway. Personnel have been appointed and progress is being made with regard to the further development of appropriate courses and of the Gaeltacht Education centres.

Legislation passed through both Dáil Éireann

& Seanad Éireann: June 6th 2002 – July 19th, 2004

- 1) Electoral (Amendment) (No. 2) Act, 2002
- 2) Minister for the Environment and Local Government (Performance of Certain Functions) Act, 2002
- 3) European Union (Scrutiny) Act, 2002
- 4) Twenty-Sixth Amendment of the Constitution Act, 2002
- 5) British-Irish Agreement (Amendment) Act, 2002
- 6) European Communities (Amendment) Act, 2002
- 7) Appropriation Act, 2002
- 8) National Development Finance Agency Act, 2002
- 9) Domestic Violence (Amendment) Act, 2002
- 10) Social Welfare Act, 2002
- 11) Planning and Development (Amendment) Act, 2002
- 12) Statute Law (Restatement) Act, 2002
- 13) Capital Acquisitions Tax Consolidation Act, 2003
- 14) Unclaimed Life Assurance Policies Act, 2003
- 15) Finance Act, 2003
- 16) Social Welfare (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 2003
- 17) Motor Vehicle (Duties and Licences) Act, 2003
- 18) Data Protection (Amendment) Act, 2003
- 19) Employment Permits Act, 2003
- 20) Local Government Act, 2003
- 21) Freedom of Information (Amendment) Act, 2003
- 22) National Tourism Development Authority Act, 2003
- 23) Health Insurance (Amendment) Act, 2003
- 24) Central Bank and Financial Services Authority of Ireland Act
- 25) Broadcasting (Major Events Television Coverage) (Amendment) Act 2003
- 26) Redundancy Payments Act 2003
- 27) Licensing of Indoor Events Act 2003
- 28) Criminal Justice (Public Order) Act 2003
- 29) Local Government (No. 2) Act 2003
- 30) Criminal Justice (Illicit Traffic By Sea) Act 2003
- 31) Garda Síochána (Police Co-operation) Act 2003
- 32) European Convention on Human Rights Act 2003
- 33) Fisheries (Amendment) Act 2003
- 34) Opticians (Amendment) Act 2003
- 35) Digital Hub Development Agency Act 2003
- 36) Arts Act 2003
- 37) Taxi Regulation Act 2003
- 38) Immigration Act 2003
- 39) Protection of the Environment Act 2003
- 40) Houses of the Oireachtas Commission Act 2003
- 41) Protection of Employees (Fixed-Term Work) Act 2003
- 42) Industrial Development (Science Foundation Ireland) Act 2003
- 43) Intoxicating Liquor Act 2003
- 44) Official Languages Act 2003
- 45) Oil Pollution of the Sea (Civil Liability and Compensation) (Amendment) Act 2003
- 46) Criminal Justice (Temporary Release of Prisoners) Act 2003
- 47) Containment of Nuclear Weapons Act 2003
- 48) Courts and Court Officers (Amendment) Act 2003
- 49) Road Traffic Act 2003
- 50) European Communities (Amendment) Act 2003
- 51) Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Powers and Functions) Act 2003
- 52) Independent Monitoring Commission Act 2003
- 53) Social Welfare Act 2003

- 54) Appropriation Act 2003
- 55) Broadcasting (Funding) Act 2003
- 56) Companies (Auditing and Accounting) Act 2003
- 57) European Arrest Warrant Act 2003
- 58) Personal Injuries Assessment Board Act 2003
- 59) Immigration Act 2004
- 60) European Parliament Elections (Amendment) Act 2004
- 61) Civil Registration Act 2004
- 62) Industrial Relations (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2004
- 63) Motor Vehicle (Duties and Licences) Act 2004
- 64) Public Health (Tobacco) (Amendment) Act 2004
- 65) Public Service Superannuation (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2004
- 66) Finance Act 2004
- 67) Social Welfare (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2004
- 68) Aer Lingus Act 2004
- 69) Air Navigation and Transport (International Conventions) Act 2004
- 70) Private Security Services Act 2004
- 71) Tribunals of Inquiry (Evidence) (Amendment) Act 2004
- 72) An Bord Bia (Amendment) Act 2004
- 73) Electoral (Amendment) Act 2004
- 74) Committees of the Houses of the Oireachtas (Compellability, Privileges and Immunities of Witnesses) (Amendment) Act 2004
- 75) Child Trafficking and Pornography (Amendment) Act 2004
- 76) Copyright and Related Rights (Amendment) Act 2004
- 77) Health (Amendment) Act 2004
- 78) Twenty-seventh Amendment of the Constitution Act 2004
- 79) Criminal Justice (Joint Investigation Teams) Act 2004
- 80) Central Bank and Financial Services Authority Act 2004
- 81) Civil Liability and Courts Act 2004
- 82) Commissions of Investigation Act 2004
- 83) Education for Persons With Special Educational Needs Act 2004
- 84) Electricity (Supply) (Amendment) Act 2004
- 85) Equality Act 2004
- 86) International Development Association Act 2004
- 87) Maritime Security Act 2004
- 88) Maternity Protection (Amendment) Act 2004
- 89) National Monuments (Amendment) Act 2004
- 90) Residential Tenancies Act 2004
- 91) State Airports Bill 2004