

Draft Programme

Confidential Draft

12th June 2007.

9.30pm

FINAL DOCUMENT

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THE ECONOMY

Long-term responsibility is the foundation on which the new Government's economic policy is built. Our economic policy must accept the reality that we cannot and must not compete on the basis of low wages. If we are to compete effectively and in a sustainable way, we will have to do so through even greater competitiveness in knowledge-driven industries.

Our guiding economic principles for the next five years are:

- We will aim to achieve further significant, sustainable growth with our programme based on an average growth rate of 4.5%.
- We will operate a responsible fiscal policy characterised by broad budget balance and a declining debt burden.
- We will deliver the National Development Plan in full, on time and within budget to raise our productivity, to enhance our competitiveness and to secure our future prosperity.
- We will invest in increasing the productive capacity of the economy, particularly in terms of ensuring high-levels of high-quality employment.

Budgetary Policy

Our guiding principles for fiscal policy for the next five years are to:

- Keep the budget in broad balance and fully within our commitments under the Stability & Growth Pact.
- Retain the flexibility to deal with any future shocks.
- Set aside a minimum of 1% of GNP per annum to provide for the future pensions of today's workers.
- Implement a series of significant and sustainable increases in key public services such as pensions, health and schools.
- Keep the overall tax burden low and implement further changes to enhance the rewards of work while increasing the fairness of the tax system.

Building the Public Wealth

Once our current prosperity is safeguarded, policy must seek to build for the future by raising our productive capacity and in so doing improve our potential to enjoy a better quality of life. That is the context in which the new National Development Plan was framed. With a total cost of €184 billion over seven years, the Plan involves a major acceleration of Government capital investment.

We believe that the full implementation of the NDP must be the first priority of the next administration. The NDP will make our economy and our society stronger and will substantially increase the probability that our good fortune will benefit future generations. It will protect and sustain our prosperity, not threaten it.

Ireland is now an income-rich country. However, we are still poor in terms of our public wealth due to decades of under-investment in infrastructure.

- To correct this imbalance, we have committed to investing 5.4% of GNP in public infrastructure through the NDP.
- This will be implemented through a coordinated, multi-annual programme which is subject to rigorous value for money and quality oversight.

Through sound management of the economy, this Government will ensure that this resource commitment is maintained over the lifetime of the next government. Closing the infrastructure gap as expeditiously as possible has significant benefits and will enhance quality of life and economic competitiveness for generations to come. We will deliver the public infrastructure which this country needs if it is to sustain and consolidate the gains of the past decade.

Competitiveness and Innovation

Ireland's future prosperity is critically dependent on our ability to trade with the world. The Government will underpin Ireland's success as a highly-productive, trading nation by the following measures:

- Through the National Development Plan, we will invest over €8.2 billion in Science, Technology and Innovation. This investment will transform the type of R&D and innovation taking place across our enterprise sector.
- Our ongoing investment in education and training will ensure that our workforce is equipped with the necessary skills to enhance our productivity and competitiveness
- Under Transport 21, our national infrastructure will be overhauled and upgraded with positive consequences for business costs and productivity.
- We will instigate a review of the entire economic regulatory environment. This review will be designed to ensure that the existing regulatory regime is operating efficiently, is balancing the needs of users with the requirements of producers and is not imposing excessive costs on the economy.
- Recognising the importance of small business to our economy, we will continue to support and enhance the Business Expansion and Seed Capital Schemes.

- We recognise the vital role played by low taxes in our economic success. We guarantee that the 12.5% rate of corporation tax will remain.
- We will resolutely oppose any attempt to introduce tax harmonisation within the European Union, either directly or through technical measures.

Ireland's dynamic and flexible economy will continue to be one of the most attractive locations in the world to invest, to employ and to do business in.

A Fair Tax System

Subject to the controlling economic and fiscal framework, the Government will implement the following specific approach to tax:

- Our first priority remains low and middle income earners – therefore our first task will be to use tax credits and bands to keep low income earners out of the standard rate band and average earners out of the higher band.
- PRSI, as currently devised, is not a fair tax as it is not levied on incomes above €48,800. Consequently, it is most lightly borne by those on the highest incomes. To eliminate this inequity, we will abolish the PRSI ceiling for full rate payers and reduce the rate at which this tax is levied from 4% to 2% over the lifetime of the next administration. We will also reduce the rate of PRSI paid by the self employed to 2% from 3%. These moves will eliminate remaining inequality in the income tax system and enhance its progressive nature. The Social Insurance Fund will be reimbursed by the Exchequer for the cost of this reform.
- Once these commitments are met, any additional resources will be targeted at further enhancing the rewards of work. Specifically, we are committed to reducing the standard rate of income tax to 18% and the higher rate of income tax to 40% over the lifetime of the government if economic resources allow.
- We will introduce measures to further weight VRT and motor tax in favour of cars with lower emissions.
- Appropriate fiscal instruments, including a carbon levy, will be phased in on a revenue-neutral basis over the lifetime of this Government.

Commission on Taxation

In order to review the efficiency and appropriateness of the Irish taxation system, the Government will establish a new Commission on Taxation. While the Commission will have a wide remit to consider the structure of the taxation system, it will be specifically charged with considering and making recommendations on the following:

- Examine the balance achieved between taxes collected on income, capital and spending and report on it.
- Review all tax expenditures with a view to recommending the discontinuation of those that are unjustifiable on cost/benefit grounds;
- Consider options for the future financing of local government;
- In the context of maintaining a strong economy, investigate fiscal measures to protect and enhance the environment including the introduction of a carbon tax.

Value Added Tax

The current VAT classifications will be examined with a view to reducing the rate of VAT applied to certain environmental goods and services from 21% to 13.5%.

Supporting Home Ownership While Protecting House Values and Jobs

We are determined to help first-time buyers directly and substantially without disturbing market conditions, driving increases in house prices, and putting the more than 260,000 construction jobs at risk.

We will legislate immediately to abolish stamp duty for all first-time buyers and make this change retrospective for all deeds presented for stamping to the Revenue Commissioners on or after 30th April 2007. We will also implement major changes in mortgage interest relief for first-time buyers and those who bought a house in the past seven years. We will increase in Budget 2008 the ceiling on mortgage interest relief for first-time buyers and those who bought a house in the past seven years, from €8,000 to €10,000 for single people and from €6,000 to €20,000 for couples or widowed persons. As income tax rates are reduced, we will keep the rate of mortgage interest relief at 20% for all home owners.

KEEPING IRELAND WORKING

We are committing ourselves as a Government to a coordinated series of steps to support the creation of 250,000 jobs over the next five years.

Guiding Principles

Our policies to achieve this target will fit within a key set of principles:

- Keep taxes on employment low.
- Invest in research and development.
- Significantly upskill the Irish workforce at all levels.
- Develop a growing focus on the dynamic SME sector.
- Where possible reduce the regulatory burden faced by business.
- Ensure that employment standards are met throughout the economy.

Tax and Regulation

This Government will:

- Ensure that our regulatory framework remains flexible, proportionate and up to date.
- Keep Ireland's Corporation Tax at its current level at most and veto any EU proposal which might undermine this.
- Continue to enhance the Business Expansion Scheme and the Seed Capital Scheme.
- Examine measures to limit the ability of local authorities to impose punitive charges on local businesses.
- Implement procedures to ensure direct feedback from business on regulatory burdens and publish annual reports on how these issues have been addressed.

Small & Medium Enterprises

There are over 250,000 small businesses operating across the country, which employ a total of over 800,000 people or 40% of the workforce. This number is growing – businesses up by 50% and employment by 79% in recent years. We are committed to helping SMEs grow, becoming more knowledge-based and being a key driver of future success.

This Government will:

- Encourage financial institutions to provide European Investment Fund guaranteed loan finance to small businesses.
- Continue to enhance the Business Expansion Scheme (BES) and the Seed Capital Scheme (SCS) following on from changes introduced in Budget 2007.
- Make Innovation Vouchers available to small businesses in every sector, to be exchanged for advice, expertise and information from accredited knowledge providers. This will build on the initiative taken this year when Ireland became only the second country in Europe to introduce this scheme to help small businesses.
- Actively encourage more "Competence Centres" which will bring together companies that have similar research problems and team them with highly qualified researchers to produce new technologies, bring their results to market and deliver a competitive advantage to Irish industry.
- Provide Knowledge Acquisition Grants to enable small businesses in the manufacturing and internationally traded service sectors to gain access to research-based knowledge, expertise and facilities in higher education institutes.

Manufacturing

To help the manufacturing sector to compete more effectively, we will:

- Assist smaller manufacturing firms to realise the potential of information technology by appointing a Director for the R&D programme support structures.
- Support upskilling of low-skilled workers in the manufacturing sector by investing more than €2.8 billion over the next six years in upskilling.
- Fully co-operate with the High Level Group on Manufacturing established under Towards 2016.
- Ensure better exploitation of domestic opportunities to facilitate companies in applying for public sector contracts.
- Support the change process in companies through advice and assistance.
- Support the establishment of R&D units in manufacturing companies.

Competition and Consumer Protection

We believe that competition and consumer protection are essential parts of maintaining a vibrant economy. We are determined to ensure that competition thrives and that costs to the consumer are kept to a minimum.

We will:

- Ensure that prices of goods are labelled and transparent so the consumer is well-informed.
- Make consumers more aware of their rights through information campaigns and through the education system.
- Prevent consumers from being charged extra for using a particular method of payment of their choice - either cash, credit or debit card.
- Maintain the ban on Pyramid selling and ensure that penalties are enforced which includes €500,000 fines and /or imprisonment.
- On-the-spot fines will be introduced for breaches of consumer law.
- Ensure that Consumer Codes of Conducts are published by businesses.
- Ensure that the National Consumers' Agency is accessible to all people who have queries or complaints via low-cost calls or web-sites.

- Enforcement will be a core focus of the Agency.
- Ensure product safety by operating the EU Rapex scheme.
- Make sure that the needs of the consumer and national competitiveness are fully accounted for in the pricing decisions of regulators.
- Regulate property management companies to ensure that the interests of consumers are protected.

Managing Economic Migration

We are determined to manage economic migration in a way that protects the rights of all workers, maintains unemployment at the lowest possible level and ensures successful integration.

We will:

- Continue to issue green cards in respect of occupations where there are skills shortages, including those for example in the information technology, biopharma, engineering and health sectors.
- Only grant work permits where it can be demonstrated, following a rigorous labour market test, that suitable employees are not available within the EEA.
- Allow workers to apply for and reapply for their own permit and to transfer to another employment in cases of mistreatment. We will also provide for spouses of employment permit holders who are granted residence in Ireland to be granted an employment permit.
- Ensure that the employment rights of non-EEA students are protected by requiring them to have work permits which will allow them to work for a maximum of 20 hours a week.
- Re-establish an Intra-Company transfer scheme for temporary trans-national top management transfers to enable companies to meet short-term needs.
- Ensure that employment permit applications are not approved for wages below the REA/ERO rate or the National Minimum Wage, and that there is full enforcement of employment law to protect workers from being abused.
- Increase the number of Labour Inspectors to 90.
- Ensure that workers are made aware of their rights through initiatives such as printing the minimum wage on the work permit and providing information in a range of languages.
- Protect employees against employers deducting recruitment expenses from pay and retaining workers personal documents.

Skills for the Future

This Government will guarantee that our workforce becomes more skilled at all levels to ensure that we make the transition to a competitive, innovation-driven, knowledge-based economy. To achieve this objective we will invest over €7.7 billion over the next 6 years in training and skills development and will:

- Expand the role of FÁS and Enterprise Ireland to increase the “employer commitment” to training, particularly in the SME sector.
- Invest in SME owner/manager Development Programmes.
- Expand the Competency Development Programmes, allowing more workers across all sectors and company sizes the opportunity to upskill.
- Fund Regional Skills Advisory Groups which consist of both firms and education/training providers so that the needs of each region are met.
- Utilise the National Training Fund to assist companies in improving their employees’ skill sets.
- Ensure that FÁS expands the Excellence Through People programmes (ETP) to reach 500,000 workers by 2020.
- Expand the Training Networks Programme which will increase the number of training grants given to companies and the Skillsnet Training programme which allows companies to access training
- Make it easier to access FÁS apprenticeship programmes by increasing the number of places across the country. We will add to the number of occupations to ensure the continued skills relevance and we will do this in consultation with the Social Partners

We are also committed to updating the present apprenticeship programmes to keep them responsive, competitive and productive.

Keeping Ireland Ahead at the Cutting Edge

The Government will continue to invest to enable Ireland to compete seriously as a “Knowledge Economy”.

Over the next five years we will:

- Double investment in R&D.
- Fully implement the Strategy on Science Technology and Innovation.
- Ensure a doubling of PhDs in Science, Engineering and Technology.
- Simplify grants and supports to businesses to conduct R&D.
- Double the spending on BERD (Business Expenditure on R&D) by 2013.
- Enhance the R&D Tax credit scheme.
- Ensure that there is enhanced industry/academia collaboration to benefit business and secure growth.
- Establish cluster R&D groups to help further bring together both industry and academia.
- Endeavour to reach the EU Lisbon goals on R&D and Innovation.

SOCIAL PARTNERSHIP

We are determined to maintain the success of Social Partnership in the years ahead by:

- Working with the social partners to ensure the full implementation of the *Towards 2016 Agreement*.
- The Government is committed in accordance with the terms of *Towards 2016*, to integrating environmental considerations into policy formulation and to providing for better environmental enforcement. The Government will, therefore, increase the resources available to Comhar, in particular with a view to enhancing its capacity to undertake analysis of policy issues and policy performance. To link its work to the broader analytical and deliberative mechanisms of social partnership, Comhar will be established as a body within the National Economic and Social Development Office. Its functions will include monitoring and advising on the effectiveness of policy in achieving the goals of the Climate Change Strategy. Arrangements for representation of environmental issues in social partnership will be considered in the course of the review of *Towards 2016* which will take place in 2008.
- Ensuring that pay improvements for public sector workers continue to be linked to delivery and verification of agreed improvements in public services.

Ensuring Value for Money

All expenditure under the NDP 2007-2013 will be subject, as appropriate, to a robust Value for Money framework. Key elements of this framework include:

- All capital projects over €30 million will require a full cost benefit analysis in line with the Department of Finance guidelines of February 2005;
- New procurement arrangements which will deliver greater cost certainty for public capital projects;
- NDP Programme Evaluations and Value for Money and Policy Reviews will be published and submitted to the relevant Select Committees of the Oireachtas; and
- All Ministers will submit an Annual Output Statement with their Annual Estimates to the relevant Oireachtas Committee. This will detail target outputs for the Estimates and the following years' Statement will set out achievements against target. This process will encompass Exchequer funded NDP spending.

Public Sector Management

This Government will:

- Support the further opening up of management roles to the best qualified candidates.
- Roll out the new Performance Management and Development System (PMDS). It is an essential tool for managing performance and career development for all staff. A consistent evaluation system should identify outstanding performance and highlight underperformance.
- Implement improvements in human resource management which ensure that all public servants are helped to develop to the best of their ability.
- Support succession and career planning to ensure a talent pipeline for the future leadership of the public sector.

Decentralisation

This Government will:

- Continue to move ahead with decentralisation taking account of the National Spatial Strategy.
- Ensure that no public servant is obliged to accept decentralisation against their wishes and that promotion opportunities remain available.

TRANSPORT

Overall, it is our intention to implement a programme under *Transport 21* of investment and service development which will:

- Cut travelling times
- Improve safety
- Deliver real commuting choice
- Reduce congestion
- Protect the environment

We are committed to the implementation of *Transport 21* on time and on budget.

Public Transport

Recognising the importance of long-term planning in public transport investment, the Government will in 2011 commence preparation of a successor to the 2006-2015 *Transport 21* programme.

We will:

Substantially improve and expand Luas services in Dublin by:

- Joining the Green and Red Luas lines.
- Extending Luas to Docklands.
- Extending Luas to Citywest.
- Extending Luas to Cherrywood.
- Extending Luas to Lucan.
- Extending Luas from the City Centre to Liffey Junction (Broadstone/Cabra).
- Extending Luas to Rathfarnham subject to a feasibility study.

Improve rail services under *Transport 21* by:

- Reopening the Western Rail Corridor from Ennis to Claremorris.
- Examining the feasibility of reopening the line from Claremorris to Sligo.
- Opening the Cork-Midleton rail service.
- Providing a commuter rail service between Galway and Athenry.
- Opening the Navan rail line.
- Explore the use of high speed trains on the Cork-Dublin route
- Build the interconnector between Docklands and Heuston stations. The interconnector will allow the integration of all existing and new Dublin suburban rail lines and facilitate interchange between them. Given the importance of this project to the delivery of a fully-integrated public transport network in our capital city, we will immediately investigate ways of expediting this project.
- Opening Metro North, the first Metro for Dublin, from St Stephen's Green to Swords via Dublin Airport.
- Opening Metro West connecting Tallaght and Ballymun through Clondalkin, Liffey Valley and Blanchardstown.

Improve bus services under *Transport 21* by:

- Reforming bus licensing to facilitate the optimum provision of services by providing a level playing field for all market participants.
- Continuing to develop QBCs in Dublin and the regional cities.
- Doubling the length of bus priority schemes to improve the quality, reliability and efficiency of the fleet of buses serving the Greater Dublin Area (i.e. Dublin, Kildare, Meath, Wicklow).
- Introduce integrated ticketing and smart-card technologies, which will allow a differential pricing system to be introduced.

We will plan and deliver strategies for the future development of integrated public transport. In co-operation with the relevant local authorities, we will conduct integrated transport and land use plans in the Spatial Strategy hubs immediately taking into account both current and future needs. We will conduct feasibility studies to be completed within two years into Luas-style light rail transit systems in Cork, Galway, Limerick and Waterford.

We will introduce a multi-criteria analysis of all transport projects to take into account environmental factors on a whole project basis

The Government will continue to review our transport needs and where agreed will proceed with new transport projects.

Following the ongoing review of the 'Platform for Change' plan for Dublin, we will review the potential to introduce further public projects to complement the expanding network.

Dublin Transport Authority

Given the complexity and scale of the public transport plans for Dublin contained in *Transport 21*, the Government is committed to expediting the establishment of the Dublin Transport Authority. In applying this policy nationally, the Government will introduce the need for a National Transport Regulator in the context of the fundamental review of the entire economic regulatory regime which will be established immediately.

We will establish and support the work of the Dublin Transport Authority (DTA), which will have overall responsibility for surface transport in the Greater Dublin Area.

The principal functions of the proposed Authority relate to:

- Strategic Transport Planning;
- Procurement of Public Transport Infrastructure;
- Procurement of Public Transport Services;
- Regulation of Public Transport Fares, routes, and service levels;
- Delivery of integrated ticketing, integrated passenger information and integrated fares
- Ensuring effective traffic management.

A critical change to current arrangements is that current and capital Exchequer funds will be allocated by the DTA to the public transport operators for the provision of public transport infrastructure and services.

Delivery of an Integrated Public Transport System

An Authority with the necessary powers to ensure delivery is critical to putting in place the integrated public transport system envisioned under Transport 21. These powers of the DTA set out in the legislation can be summarised as follows:

- Responsibility for the allocation of Exchequer funds gives the DTA the power to ensure the delivery of priority transport projects;
- The power of the DTA to contract for services allows the integration of services and infrastructure, and will, for example, allow the DTA ensure that bus services are effectively integrated with the metro on its completion;
- The DTA is required to endeavour to deliver public transport infrastructure projects through existing agencies, but should it consider it more efficient and expeditious to do so it can deliver a project itself. This mirrors the powers of the NRA in respect of national roads and has been used successfully by the NRA in relation to PPP projects and national road signposting;
- The DTA can issue a direction to a transport agency requiring it to deliver or take a particular action in delivering a project. Should the transport agency refuse the DTA can “step-in” and take over the projects and all contracts will transfer to the DTA. This power, which might only be used in extreme circumstances, ensures that where a recalcitrant agency is not following the directions of the DTA, the Authority can ensure the delivery of a project in accordance with its direction by doing the project itself; and
- The DTA also has a power of direction in relation to issues such as ensuring compliance by transport agencies with integrated ticketing, integrated passenger information and integrated fares. Again the DTA can issue a direction requiring a transport agency to take certain actions. If the agency refuses, the DTA is empowered to go to the High Court and obtain a court order requiring the agency to abide by the direction. Where an agency continued to refuse to abide by the direction, it would be in contempt of court, with it being open to the court to apply the relevant sanctions for such contempt.

Roads

The development of a high-quality route network carries significant benefits for our competitiveness, balanced regional development and the safety of our roads. In government we will complete:

- The five inter-urban motorways connecting Dublin to Belfast, Cork, Galway, Limerick and Waterford.
- The Atlantic Road Corridor connecting Letterkenny and Waterford through Sligo, Charlestown, Tuam, Galway, Gort, Ennis, Limerick, Mallow and Cork to motorway standard.
- The Border Road Corridor connecting Dundalk to Sligo via Enniskillen.
- High quality road corridors to the Border, the North West and the West connecting Mullingar and Westport/Ballina/Sligo, Kells and Belturbet, as well as Ardee and Monaghan.
- The Eastcoast N11 dual carriageway to Rosslare.
- The Dublin to Letterkenny/Derry dual carriageway.
- We will prepare for the delivery of the Dublin Outer Orbital Route.
- We will ensure that the traffic blackspot of Claregalway is bypassed in 2012.

Once this essential network is completed, the primary task of the National Roads Authority will turn to maintenance of the network.

Road Safety

We will support the work of the Road Safety Authority and continue to promote safety education programmes such as extending the Safe Routes Programme, introducing a National Cycle Route, and Dublin Coast Walk and Cycle Route in order to reduce road deaths.

- Extension of traffic calming measures around the country.

ENERGY

A reliable and affordable supply of energy is central to many elements of economic and social life.

The Government is committed to securing both long-term energy security and a low carbon future for Ireland.

We will achieve the following commitments across three energy pillars:

Security of Supply

We will:

- Ensure that electricity supply consistently meets demand.
- Ensure the security and reliability of gas supplies.
- Enhance the diversity of fuels used for power generation especially renewables.
- Ensure the development of a landbank of state owned power generation sites to facilitate the entry of new independent generation.
- Deliver the East/West and second North/South electricity interconnectors.
- Deliver electricity and gas to homes and businesses over networks that are efficient, reliable and secure.
- Create a stable, environment for hydrocarbon exploration while increasing the return to the State.
- Mitigate the impact of any energy supply disruptions by ensuring that contingency measures are in place.

Environmental Sustainability

We will:

- Dramatically accelerate the growth of renewable energy sources in the electricity, heat and transport sectors of the economy. One third of all electricity consumed will come from renewable energy by 2020.
- Remove any regulatory barriers to combined heat and power and district heating systems.
- Introduce co-firing at each of the three peat stations with up to 30% biomass by 2015, which will reduce greenhouse gas emissions from those three stations by 900,000 tonnes per annum and will also extend the life of those stations.
- Implement in full the National Bioenergy Action Plan for Ireland, which will reduce greenhouse gas emission by at least 2 million tonnes per annum.
- Promote the enhanced deployment of green energy technologies and the sustainable use of energy in transport.
- Introduce a biofuels obligation scheme by 2009.
- Work with our EU partners to require biofuels used in transport to comply with an environment certification system which incorporates sustainability criteria in terms of biofuels production
- Promote the sustainable use of energy in transport.
- Maximise energy efficiency and energy savings across the economy with a target of 20% energy savings by 2020 and 33% for public sector.
- Introduce new national building standards in 2007 to ensure that new housing has 40% lower heat energy demand than existing building standards and revise them again in 2010 to achieve a 60% target in further years.
- Incentivise people to move towards greater energy efficiencies in their homes especially through improved attic and wall insulation.
- Ensure that the ESB installs a new smart electronic meter in every home in the country which will allow people to reduce their bills by cutting back on unnecessary use of electricity.
- Facilitate the introduction of net metering to allow consumers to sell electricity back into the grid from any renewable power supplies they have.
- Stimulate the development of alternative energy sources.
- Support Energy Research Development and Innovation Programmes.
- Maintain the REFIT scheme and keep it under review to encourage investment in wind farms, biomass and anaerobic digester power plants in order to provide a stable environment for energy enterprises.
- Provide for a distributed grid connection system to encourage the development of small scale and community-owned renewable power supplies.
- Devise a price support scheme to support and encourage investment in the development of wave and tidal power.
- Keep under examination the possibility of appropriate support measures for offshore wind.
- Work with the European Commission and other national grid operators to develop an offshore wind farm grid connection system to power the rest of Europe.
- Establish a dedicated Ocean Energy Development Unit. The Unit mandate will be to develop the sector and work to a target of at least 500 MW of wave and tidal energy by 2020 with an interim target of 75 MW in 2012.
- Aim to create an export-oriented Ocean Energy sector focused on the technologies associated with this exciting sector through R&D supports and grant funding of start-up production in the sector.
- Support the establishment of community methane digesters to reduce pollution and simultaneously produce methane gas which can be used in CHP plants – this could also go some way to relieving the need for slurry storage required under the Nitrates directive.

- Ensure that the new all-island energy market is designed to ensure the maximum use of renewable energy in the system.
- Amend the remit of Science Foundation Ireland to include a third research pillar in the area of sustainable energy and energy efficiency technologies.
- Review the remit and operation of Sustainable Energy Ireland

Energy- Competitiveness

We will:

- Deliver competition and consumer choice in the energy market in support of economic growth and national competitiveness.
- Oversee the successful introduction of the Single Electricity Market in 2007.
- Keep the electricity and gas network infrastructures, as strategic national assets, in State ownership and ensure that these assets are never privatised.
- Oversee the transfer of transmission assets to EirGrid, establishing it as the National Transmission Grid Company by end 2008.
- Operate natural monopoly electricity network businesses under a risk-related rate of return, leading to reduced network tariffs which will be passed on in full to electricity customers.
- Reduce the market power held by any one player in price-setting generation plants.
- Ensure a sustainable future for the Semi-State Energy Enterprises.
- Provide substantial financial support to improve the energy efficiency of existing public housing and assist those on low incomes to avoid fuel poverty.
- Expand and develop programmes for energy conservation to ensure the most efficient use of energy.

COMMUNICATIONS

Broadband

A world-class telecommunications sector is critical to our continued economic and social prosperity. We are committed to moving Ireland to the forefront of knowledge-based economies in the world through the provision of open access broadband. A state-of-the-art telecommunications network will be the key infrastructure that will enable this and support information intensive industry and bandwidth-hungry citizens.

We will:

- Complete the roll-out of broadband throughout the country with the National Broadband Scheme (NBS). This will mean that the last 10%-15% of the country, which will never have access to broadband without intervention or support, will now have access to broadband, provided on a technology-neutral basis.
- Encourage the progressive shift to IP based Next Generation Networks.
- Encourage the separation of Eircom's network from its commercial retail business into a separate entity to be regulated by ComReg, on a fully open-access and transparent basis.
- Tender contracts to provide broadband availability to the final 10% of the country. The successful tenderers will have to commit to deploy technological solutions to allow maximum competition.
- Expand the current free telephone rental scheme by providing for free broadband for older people. Industry will be invited to tender for the provision of the new bundled broadband and rental service for older people.

Broadcasting

We are committed to creating an environment that encourages the maintenance of high quality Irish radio and television services by both independent broadcasters and RTÉ and securing a viable future for high quality public service broadcasting in the Irish market.

This Government will:

- Enact the Broadcasting Bill to ensure a comprehensive, modern framework of law for the sector.
- Establish the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland.
- Ensure a speedy right to reply to those who have been defamed in radio or television programmes.
- Work with the various broadcasting organisations and interested parties to review rules relating to the advertising of 'junk food' aimed at young people. This is with a view to phasing out such advertising.
- Complete the pilot DTT project and complete roll-out of DTT well in advance of the EU 2012 deadline.
- Place reviews of the licence fee on a statutory basis.
- Provide increased funding to TG4 for increased Irish language programming.
- Maximise the number of home-produced programmes within the RTE schedule.
- Digitise the RTÉ archives for use in education and research.
- Ensure RTÉ supports broadcasting to the Irish community abroad. We will examine the possibility of working with the UK Government and the Northern Ireland Authorities to develop an all-island digital 'free to air' broadcasting service carrying RTÉ1, RTÉ2, TG4, TV3 and the main public service channels in the UK and in North Ireland.
- Ensure a fair and competitive environment for the independent TV and radio sector.
- Work with the Houses of the Oireachtas and other local authorities to introduce programming carrying live feeds of Oireachtas business and Local Council meetings, where possible.

Postal Services

We will ensure that Irish business and domestic customers enjoy competitively priced, high-quality postal services. The Government will:

- Ensure a strong, viable post office network, which reaches into every community in Ireland and which properly remunerates all those involved in it.
- Develop An Post as a top-class financial services entity to help in that aim.
- Ensure that as many Government services as possible operate through the post office network.
- Introduce a postcode system to Ireland to ensure a strong competitive postal sector and to reduce costs significantly for consumers, business and the voluntary sector.
- Insist on much improved “next day delivery” rates and link them to any future stamp price increases.
- Empower ComReg to withhold increases and/or clawback income where delivery targets are not met.

ENVIRONMENT

With the scale of the environmental challenges facing the world, it is clear that serious action must go on. This is why this Government is committing itself to moving Ireland into the top five countries in the world as measured by the Environmental Performance Index

Climate Change: A Challenge for the Whole World

As a developed country, as a Member State of the EU, and as a responsible nation in the wider international community, Ireland must play its part in meeting the most important environmental issue facing the world today.

Meeting our obligations to the future generations requires all sectors in society to play their part. To ensure this Government will implement a comprehensive range of measures as set out in the new National Climate Change Strategy. This Government believes in the need to commit to a clean and renewable energy future and we commit ourselves to a Green Energy Revolution.

In particular, we will:

- Agree an all-party approach on climate change targets.
- In advance of agreeing such targets, the Government will set a target for this administration of a reduction of 3% per year on average in our greenhouse gas emissions.
- Mandate the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government to publish an Annual Report setting out progress on meeting climate change targets.
- Increase the use of alternative energies for generating power in order to ensure that one third of electricity consumed in Ireland comes from renewable sources by 2020.
- Create new opportunities for our farmers by moving agriculture to a new dual system of food and power production.
- Facilitate the establishment of a new bio-fuel industry in Ireland on the back of this new agricultural production.
- Improve the energy efficiency of new Irish homes by up to 40% or more.
- Introduce a minimum requirement for the use of bio-fuels in State-owned and public transport vehicles. Dublin Bus and Bus Eireann will move their existing fleet to a 5% bio-diesel blend and will achieve a 30% bio-diesel blend in their new buses.
- Make clear provision in Development Plans for environmentally sustainable transport methods.
- Continue to use the taxation system to encourage good environmental behaviour and discourage poor practice, for example through rebalancing the VRT and Motor Tax system to reward the purchase of greener cars.
- Complete the phasing out of incandescent light bulbs in favour of more energy efficient compact fluorescent bulbs to reduce our carbon emissions and save on electricity costs.
- Require the public sector to lead the way on energy efficiency with a mandatory programme of efficiency measures including the sole use of energy efficient lighting and heating in offices, schools and hospitals and other public buildings to produce 33% energy savings by 2020.
- Require all street lighting and traffic lighting systems to be energy efficient and replace inefficient systems.
- Require carbon offsetting of all official air travel in support of urban forests.
- Require the mandatory use of bio-fuel mixes in transport fuels and ensure that there is a nationwide bio-fuel distribution network.
- Ensure that the development of renewable energy heating systems is encouraged through targeted grant schemes and facilitated by appropriate planning exemptions.
- Introduce smart electricity meters and ensure that energy produced in the home and at work can be sold back into the national grid.
- Implement all aspects of Transport 21 to so that the use of public transport becomes a real option for more and more people.
- Establish a high level Commission on Climate Change to oversee implementation of the Climate Change Strategy.

Carbon Report

The Government will mandate the Minister for Finance to present an outline carbon report (“carbon budget”) in conjunction with the annual financial Budget. This will be followed immediately by a report from the Minister for Environment, Heritage and Local

Government outlining our use of energy in the preceding year, the progress made in meeting the reduction targets, and government plans to meet the target in the following year.

Waste Management

This Government is strongly committed to a waste management hierarchy based on the cornerstones of reduction, re-use, recycling and marketing of recycled products.

We are also committed to meeting the targets to divert biodegradable waste from landfill required under the 1999 EU Landfill Directive. To achieve this, we are committed to the introduction of Mechanical Biological Treatment (MBT) facilities as one of a range of technologies.

We will ensure the highest operating standards for all waste management technologies based on best international practice. We will also ensure that all waste facilities have good transport links and where feasible are close to the national road or rail networks.

We will undertake an immediate international review of waste management plans, practices and procedures and act on its conclusions.

In the meantime, in order to reach our targets under EU legislation :

- We will ensure that for any future projects neither the State nor local authorities will be exposed to financial risk to 'put or pay' clauses in waste facilities.
- We will not alter the landfill levy in such a way as to give a competitive advantage to incineration.

In particular the Government will:

- Establish new ambitious waste management targets for maximum prevention, re-use, recycling and modern waste treatment to ensure that we match the best performance in the EU for recycling with the objective that only 10% of waste or less is consigned to landfill (down from 66% now).
- Ensure that the landfills currently provided for under regional waste management plans should be the last to be constructed for a generation.
- Drive down the cost of waste management charges to householders and business by ensuring that our waste management system is competitive and uses all available technologies to achieve this including the use of waste for generating sustainable electricity.
- Ensure the implementation of the National Strategy on Biodegradable Waste which aims to divert 80% of biodegradable waste from landfill through segregated collection of biodegradable waste, and the generation of compost.
- Establish community monitoring arrangements of major waste management facilities, including on-line monitoring where appropriate, with specific powers/rights to information.
- Expand the network of bottle banks, recycling centres and segregated collection and introduce household hazardous waste collection (e.g. paint cans etc) in all suitable recycling centres.
- Ensure flat rates on waste disposal will be abolished and a mandatory system of weight-related charges for waste collection introduced.

Environmental Protection

The Government will :

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- The EPA is now over a decade in existence. It is now timely for a review of the role, procedures and legislation governing it. Following this review, legislation will be enacted to ensure the Agency can meet the environmental challenges that lie ahead.
- Ensure Comhar is given a strengthened research role as part of the National Economic and Social Development Office.
- Publish comprehensive legislation on Noise Pollution.
- Ensure that each local authority publishes an annual audit of its environmental performance and ensure that this is linked to the new audit process being established in local government.
- Continue to invest significantly in local government environmental enforcement capacity.
- Ensure all County Development Plans are 'Sustainability proofed'.
- Fully implement the Aarhus Convention.

Environmental Enforcement

People or businesses which despoil the Irish countryside or break our environmental laws should be punished and should make good any damage caused.

We will:

- Review the level of fines and custodial sentences which can be applied by the lower Courts (where the majority of prosecutions are taken) in cases of pollution, dumping, illegal developments and other environmental crimes, so that the punishment fits the crime.

- As part of the review of the Environmental Protection Agency, initiate a study of all legislation relating to environmental fines.

Litter

Despite steady improvements in recent years, the problem of litter in Ireland is still far too widespread.

We will:

- Increase support to initiatives such as Irish Business Against Litter and the Green Schools Programme which raise awareness on litter issues.
- Use the nationwide roll out of the Community Warden Service to increase litter enforcement.
- Incentivise local action in dealing with litter, including introducing programmes such as the “adopt-a-highway” for both main and secondary roads.
- Keep the Litter Laws under review to ensure their effectiveness,
- Establish community based ‘litter watch’ systems to protect Ireland’s scenic amenities and to combat fly-tipping.

Protecting our Water

Over the next 5 years this Government will work to ensure that Ireland’s waters are the most pristine in Europe.

We will:

- Finish the job of upgrading all our local group water schemes to match the highest drinking water standards.
- Ensure that public water supplies deliver a reliable service that are 100% compliant with drinking water standards.
- Continue to invest in waste water schemes to ensure that discharges into our rivers, lakes and coastal water meet the highest international standards.
- Implement higher standards of water protection and ensure that farmers in particular have all necessary supports to operate to these standards.
- Ensure that coastal bathing water compliance rises from 96% to 100% and increase the number of Blue Flag beaches around the country.
- Introduce a scheme of support for the replacement and upgrade of septic tanks older than 15 years with newer systems.
- Provide real-time user-friendly information online on water and air quality.

Air Quality

The Environmental Protection Agency has reported that Ireland is now in compliance with 100% of the EU air quality standards for all pollutants. However, we want to further improve standards, particularly relating to emissions from the transport sector.

We will:

- Expand the network of air quality monitoring stations to improve national coverage.
- Introduce new standards for substances not previously controlled, eg. cadmium, mercury, nickel etc.
- Ensure compliance with new limits on fine particulate matter PM10, generated by vehicle engines.

Chemicals

Thousands of chemicals in everyday use have not been adequately tested for their impact on the environment and human health. The EU has adopted a comprehensive regulatory framework governing the manufacturing and use of chemicals used in Europe with the view to protecting human health and the environment and enhancing competitiveness. We will implement this initiative as a matter of priority in a way which does not impact on the competitiveness of our economy.

Dublin Bay

We will establish a Dublin Bay Area Task Force to maximise the potential of the Bay for the people of our capital city. We will consider legislation, if necessary, to implement the recommendations of this Taskforce.

Environmental Technologies

We will support the development of Environmental Technologies in Ireland to achieve a win/win situation of improved competitiveness and environmental performance

Heritage

We will:

- Complete the national survey of our built heritage within the term of the next Government so that the best of our heritage is protected under our planning laws to a common and consistent standard across the country.
- Strengthen the implementation of the Habitats Directive and other nature conservation measures. This will include improved arrangements and resourcing for designating, monitoring and protecting the natural heritage.
- Strengthen the role and operation of the Heritage Council, particularly in relation to the built heritage and examine the need for changes in the Heritage Act
- Work on a North/South basis to increase the protection available for the 2,200 remaining thatched cottages in Ireland.
- Support the work of the newly established Irish Heritage Trust.
- Update and consolidate the law on national monuments to maximise and clarify the protection provided to our archaeological heritage.
- Seek designation of Clonmacnoise as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

- Complete the designation of those remaining areas proposed for conservation purposes.
- Work with farmers and other landowners by putting in place management plans to ensure the long-term protection of these valuable conservation areas.
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- Introduce a National Landscape Strategy.
- Work on an all-island basis to protect our shared archaeological heritage.
- Control access to sensitive sites from mass tourism and in particular ensure that sensitive landscapes are protected.
- Resource the national Biological Records Centre as central database to record the richness of Ireland's flora and fauna and as centre of research excellence.
- Work on an all-Ireland basis to protect threatened species and reintroduce species which have disappeared from Ireland.

Nuclear Energy and Sellafield

We strongly believe that nuclear power is neither sustainable nor an answer to Ireland's energy needs. Nuclear power fails on grounds of environmental risk and long term economic costs. We also continue to believe that Sellafield poses an unacceptable risk.

We will:

- Continue to bring political, diplomatic and legal efforts to bear on the UK with a view to securing the safe decommissioning of all nuclear reprocessing facilities at Sellafield.
- Press at EU level for the establishment of a strong independent EU Agency to inspect nuclear installations across the EU.
- Press at EU level to have an equitable level of EU Energy Research funding to ensure support for non-polluting renewable energy sources as wind, wave, tidal, solar etc.
- Build on the Irish Government initiative to create a group of non-nuclear European states to operate as a counter balance to the pro-nuclear lobby in Europe.

Planning

The Government will :

- Ensure the Citizen's Information Bureau has the necessary resources to assist and inform the public on planning procedures.
- Review the classes of development to which Part XI applies to introduce greater accountability.
- Launch a 'Proud Cities and Towns' programme involving projects such as new parks, traffic-free areas and eco-communities to demonstrate the benefits of sustainable living.
- Review the planning regulations to strengthen the provision regarding potential abuse of public notice provisions.

TOURISM

The Government is determined to develop our Tourism industry and will provide it with sustained support and investment in the coming years.

Product Investment and Innovation

Investment is needed to ensure that our tourism product is among the best in the world and maximises the potential of our environment and heritage.

In government we will:

- Provide €300 million to assist the industry, tourism agencies and local authorities in delivering the ambitious world-class product outlined in Fáilte Ireland's Tourism Product Development Strategy 2007 –2013.
- Place much greater emphasis on the protection, conservation, interpretation and access to Ireland's natural and built heritage.
- Deepen North/South cooperation in tourism, building in particular on the success of Tourism Ireland as a dynamic and innovative cross-border body leading the way on mutually advantageous all-island economic co-operation.
- Establish, through Fáilte Ireland, an innovation fund to promote and support the development of tourism products that are new to the Irish market and to promote best practice, particularly in terms of environmental sustainability and accessibility for tourists with disabilities.
- Develop with Fáilte Ireland, rural-based package-style holidays through which B & B owners and Farm Holiday operators can offer activities such as walking, angling, golfing and cycling in addition to the provision of accommodation and quality home cooked meals.
- Develop a rolling programme of national culture, musical and literary festivals to enhance the Irish tourism product, in particular through the establishment of a new fund of €28million for the creation of a small number of major annual events over the period to 2013.
- Work with Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland to capitalise on the beauty of the Irish countryside and promote Ireland as a healthy activity holiday destination for walking, cycling, angling, golfing, sailing, equestrian and marine holidays.

Enhanced Access

We will:

- Open Terminal 2 at Dublin Airport in 2009.

- Enhance the capacity of the regional airports to attract more direct international services through the €86 million Regional Airports Capital Grant.
- Make rural locations more readily accessible for tourists on shorter visits through the delivery of the extensive plans outlined in *Transport 21*.

Creative Marketing

The Government will:

- Invest €335 million under the National Development Plan in marketing Irish Tourism.
- Seize the opportunities presented by the Open Skies arrangement with the US to substantially grow the number of US visitors. To this end, we will provide significant infrastructural development in the Mid West area, as well as marketing support to the Shannon region for a transitional period to help consolidate existing markets and develop new sources of business.
- Build on the opportunities presented by the increasing availability of low cost flights from mainland Europe and the UK.
- Undertake a strategic review of new and developing markets to identify the investment and actions needed to realise their potential.
- Put in place a strong promotional programme for the new National Conference Centre in Dublin with a view to doubling the level of business tourism to Ireland from €400 million to €800 million per year over the next ten years.
- We will also investigate the feasibility of a Regional Conference Centre in the Shannon/Limerick area.
- Encourage the Tourism Agencies to highlight our National Games to a greater degree in their promotional activities and continue the policy of attracting suitable major sporting events to Ireland.
- Seek, with the Tourism Agencies and Local Authorities, suitable areas to develop and promote eco tourism, as well as enhancing the existing Northwest Project, the Green Box.
- Invest in new information and communication technologies for marketing and customer relations management and training.
- Work with the Regional Tourism Development Boards in conjunction with Local Authorities and the Tourism Industry to develop comprehensive, interactive local area tourism web sites carrying details of all possibilities in an area for tourists and with a booking facility.

Human Resources Development With 6,000 new workers expected to join the tourism sector each year to the end of this decade, human resource development will be one of the most vital issues affecting the further development and success of tourism. To meet these needs, we will:

- Invest €149 million under the National Development Plan 2007-2013 in training and human resources in the tourism sector.
- Implement in full the Fáilte Ireland 'Competing through People' programme, which looks to people working in the Industry as a principal source of competitive advantage, and their skills as a key variable in delivering strong business results.

AGRICULTURE, FOOD & FORESTRY

We are committed to creating a dynamic and sustainable future for Irish agriculture, in which the family farm remains viable and our rural communities can prosper. We will initiate policies to ensure that the safety, quality and security of Irish food production is enhanced and that the rural environment is protected.

Key Objectives

We will:

- Support farm families in order to maximise their choice on how they farm.
- Significantly reduce the regulatory burdens faced by farmers.
- Investing in developing the new products and new food markets, which will bring long-term security for the sector.
- Protecting and enhancing our rural environment.

Global Challenges & Negotiations

As decisions affecting Irish farmers are increasingly internationalised, the strongest possible leadership for Irish agriculture is required at the world's negotiating tables.

The Government will:

- Secure the highest achievable level of support for the farming sector at EU and WTO levels.
- Continue to protect direct payments to farmers, ensure the export subsidies are dealt with in a balanced and equitable way, and promote the need for non-trade issues to be part of any further trade deals.
- Do all that is required to protect Irish consumers from imports of agricultural produce that do not meet the same standards as those required of Irish farmers.
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- Establish a high level strategic interdepartmental group whose role will be to, on an ongoing basis, identify and work to ease access and fully exploit new overseas markets for Irish food and drink products.
- Increase funding to Bord Bia for overseas promotion of Irish food and agricultural produce.

Family Farmers

We will:

- Invest in improving competitiveness, enhancing our environment and promoting diversification on and off the farm.
- Ensure that farmers have both the freedom to farm and access to all necessary supports, regardless of which path they choose.
- Introduce a new On-Farm Investment Scheme, which will include aid for investment in housing, handling and related facilities.
- Fully implement the Rural Development Programme so that farmers benefit fully from the increased payments and new schemes.
- Continue to support low-income farmers through the Farm Assist Scheme and adapt it in consultation with the farming organisations.
- Implement measures, including taxation measures, in order to assist farmers in maximising their income from farming and achieving optimum structures and scale.
- Further promote the benefits of REPS and achieve a participation rate of 70,000 farmers.

Ensuring Bio-security

We will:

- Set a target to convert a minimum 5% of acreage to organic farmland by 2012.
- Introduce an new Animal Health Bill to consolidate and amend previous legislation to reflect the changed disease status of our nation's animals.
- Establish "Biosecurity Ireland" as a division within the Department of Agriculture and Food with a remit to ensure the exclusion, eradication or effective management of risks posed by diseases and pests to the economy, the environment and to human and animal health.

Seek to negotiate the establishment of an All-Ireland GM-Free Zone.

Focus on the Consumer

We will:

- Further exploit the potential of existing animal traceability systems for the marketing and labelling of food products.
- Extend mandatory "country of origin" food labelling to sheep, pig and poultry meat.
- Increase nutritional awareness as part of our food advertising and marketing through the development of nutritional and calorific labelling.
- We will expedite the delivery of a National Strategy for Tackling Obesity and increase support for the promotion of healthy food options among young people through programmes such as the School Milk Scheme and the Food Dudes Programme for encouraging the increased consumption of fruit and vegetables.

Animal Welfare

We will:

- Promote the highest standards of animal welfare at all levels of the food production chain.
- Introduce a comprehensive Animal Welfare Bill, updating existing legislation, to ensure that the welfare of animals is properly protected and that the penalties for offenders are increased significantly.
- Continue to expand and develop our herd health policies to ensure the highest of standards of animal welfare.
- Given its level of veterinary and welfare expertise, consolidate responsibility for the welfare of all animals (including non-farm animals) within the Department of Agriculture and Food.
- Review and consolidate where necessary all legislation governing the welfare of non-farm animals.
- Continue to push for welfare and other non-trade issues to be included in WTO negotiations.

Key Sectors

There is no single programme which can be implemented to secure the future of farming, this is why we are proposing action to develop the various key sectors.

In the Beef Sector we will:

- Ensure that Irish beef processing facilities are substantially upgraded through the full roll out our €50 million investment programme.
- Continue to support the Suckler Herd Quality and Welfare Scheme to ensure that the herd is maintained at its optimum level.
- Ensure that our high standards of food safety, quality labelling and traceability will be vigorously promoted to provide a competitive advantage against low cost imports.
- Continue to relentlessly pursue the best market returns through Bord Bia, along with political and diplomatic efforts.

In the Dairy Sector we will:

- Assist in the creation of an efficient processing sector with a view to securing its longer-term competitive advantage with our €100 million investment package.
- Increase research and development funding for projects in the sector to fully exploit its potential for new products.
- Enhance the Dairy Hygiene Scheme to include feeding systems and increased thresholds for milking equipment and milk tanks.

- Introduce new Herd Health Initiative to deal with non-regulated diseases.

In the Sheepmeat Sector we will:

- Fully implement the recommendations of the Sheep Industry Strategy Group.
- Increase supports for improved breeding and sheep housing.
- Support a Quality Assurance programme, aid promotion and strengthen labelling with a view to ensuring wider and deepen penetration on home and EU markets.
- Invest in a programme to upgrade processing facilities

In the Cereals, Pigmeat & Poultry Sectors we will:

- Assist and expand the quality Assurance Schemes in these sectors.
- Aid grain storage through the Farm Improvement Programme.
- Extend “country of origin” labelling requirements in respect of pigmeat and poultry meat.

In Horticulture we will:

- Work with growers, to continue to support import substitution in the fruit and vegetable sector.

In Forestry we will:

- Promote a diverse forestry culture with an emphasis on native trees.
- Ensure that forestry continues to give an important income stream to farmers through the Forest Premium Scheme that has been substantially increased under the partnership process.
- Develop new market opportunities for thinning linked to the increased need for renewable energy sources.
- Promote forestry plantation to increase biomass production demand in the building and fuel markets and to provide ‘carbon sinks’ to combat climate change.
- Review the Forest Environmental Payments Scheme (FEPS) pilot underway with a view to a full roll out in the years ahead.
- Review the Forestry Premium levels and, ensure by 2012 that a minimum of 30% broadleaf will be planted annually
- Initiate a review of Forestry Acts and programmes to reflect sustainable social and environmental objectives.

Bio-Energy – A New Opportunity

We will:

- Implement a comprehensive Strategic plan to maximise the potential of all non-food crops to benefit our indigenous renewable energy sector and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- Continue to support research in the biofuel and biomass areas so that we can respond to new opportunities quickly.
- Ensure that the development of bio-energy will be of significant benefit to farmers and rural Ireland.
- Further encourage the growing of willow, miscanthus and other crops for biomass.

Organic Farming & Farmers’ Markets

We will:

- Strengthen support for the organic sector through the REPS scheme.
- Encourage more direct selling from farmer to customer by restoring and promoting a national network of farmers’ markets.

Cutting Red Tape

We will:

- Vigorously pursue the simplification agenda at EU level, with the immediate aim of bringing about change in the EU cross compliance checks system.
- Minimise and streamline the financial and regulatory issues facing small farms and farm businesses.
- Use the 2008 CAP “health check” to best advantage in terms of reducing the burden of paperwork on farmers.
- Work with the implementation group established under the Farmers’ Charter to monitor outcomes and ensure that the charter is modified if necessary.
- Ensure that the views of farmers are systematically sought on the paperwork linked to all revisions of schemes.

Food Businesses

We will:

- Implement policies to ensure Ireland’s “clean and green” food marketing image is protected and actively promoted.
- Consolidate all aspects of the development and promotion of the agri-food industry within the Department of Agriculture and Food and establish a Cabinet Sub-Committee on the food and beverage sector, shadowed by a high level Inter-Departmental Group.
- Work with the food industry to ensure that the maximum potential of this key indigenous sector is fully realised.
- Expand our Regional Food Forum concept to develop a forum through which researchers, producers, processors and consumers may engage and interact.
- Facilitate small food businesses by making available through Bord Bia an increased level of expert advice and support.
- Support the development of small and medium agri-enterprises and short ‘food chain’ activities.

Supporting our Young Farmers

We will:

- Continue to offer a range of supports to young farmers entering agriculture; including education, taxation measures and direct start-up aid.
- Retain stamp duty relief that continues to play an important role in the early hand-over of farms to the younger generation.
- Support our farmers by promoting measures for the minimisation of agricultural waste and for effective and environmental waste disposal, and provide supports to facilitate and ensure the implementation of EU Directives on water, waste, nitrates and integrated pollution.

Training our Farmers

We will:

- Continue to support education and training courses for both young and adult farmers.
- Fund educational and commercial development courses to equip farmers for diversification into new enterprises and revise educational curricula to take account of agriculture post-CAP.
- Ensure that courses are also available at night, at weekends and through e-learning to facilitate part-time farmers.
- Introduce a new syllabus for Leaving Certificate Agricultural Science.
- Invest in our Agricultural Colleges and restructure the environment through which they are supported.

Innovation through Research

We will:

- Further increase the level of funding committed to agri-food research to more than €641 million under the NDP, with a further €289 million for investment in capital infrastructure and marketing for the food industry.
- Require all non-core funding to be allocated in a competitive way, ensuring that all institutions competing for research money achieve the highest of standards and that research results in a tangible benefit at farm and food business level.
- Ensure regular briefings on developments for farmers and businesses.

MARINE & NATURAL RESOURCES

Marine

To ensure we reach our full potential as a maritime nation, we will:

- Through sustainable management based on scientific advice, work to maintain the annual 200,000 tonnes of quota fished annually by the Irish Fleet.
- Maintain world class fishery harbours at Castletownbere, Dunmore East, Howth, Killybegs and Rossaveel, Clogherhead. Progress the major infrastructure projects in Cromane and Greencastle.
- Each of our Fisheries Harbours has the potential to be a unique and internationally recognised brand. BIM will work with the Fisherman's Cooperatives to develop branded seafood products from those ports.
- Complete the work of fleet restructuring, to create a world-class fleet ideally suited to the stocks, species and sustainable practices of the modern fisheries sector.
- Invest in ongoing investment in fleet safety, diversification into inshore fishing activity and marine tourism.
- Seafood Development will benefit from an investment of €16 million under the new National Development Plan (NDP). A further €18 million may be made available over the life of the plan under the Cawley proposals, which will be available to the sector on the basis of verified progressive change as set out in the Cawley Report.
- Improve our marine environment by implementing environmental and inshore management systems, supporting efficient waste management, environmentally friendly fishing gear and technical innovation.
- Support the economic & social development of maritime communities the development through the provision of training and upgrading of existing skill levels, developing of infrastructure (supply chain) and support for innovation and product development.
- Increase current supports to assist fishermen to make the change-over to more environmentally friendly fishing gear and more fuel-efficient equipment. We will provide maximum permitted grant aid for a range of equipment, from environmentally friendly fishing nets to gear monitoring systems that improve fuel efficiency.
- Increase grant funding to our Aquaculture sector to develop technological innovation and environmentally sustainable techniques, including organic farming, and diversification into new species.
- Further develop Ireland's reputation as a Centre of Excellence for Marine Research.
- Instigate a National Marine Biotechnology Initiative to place Ireland as a world leader in this important sector. We see a role for the Marine Institute, SFI, Enterprise Ireland, the IDA and Universities in this.
- Optimise the amount of indigenous, renewable energy within our energy mix, which can be used safely and at a fair price to consumers. To this end, we will increase the opportunities for offshore wind and ocean and tidal energy generation.
- Ensure that voluntary fishing vessel decommissioning on the scale envisaged in the Cawley Report will be fully implemented and will be focussed on the larger whitefish vessels over 18 metres. In that context greater priority will be given in the allocation of fishing quotas to smaller vessels.
- Continue to work with coastal communities to identify and designate suitable marine protected areas to allow the regeneration of stocks and the conservation of wildlife.
- Seek to ensure that all EU Fisheries Agreements with developing countries protect the need for sustainable fish supplies to local populations and do not disrupt or threaten the activities of local traditional fishing fleets.

- Implement an observer Programme on Irish fishing Vessels involved in fisheries which carry a high risk of cetacean by catches. Irish representatives will also lobby at European Level for an intensified observer programme to be put in place to monitor cetacean by catches on all fleets involved in fisheries which have a high risk of cetacean by catches.
- Encourage and support the development of high value added branded seafood exports.
- In line with relevant EU provisions, implement a system of instant electronic logging of all catches and landings made by fishing vessels in Irish waters.
- A comprehensive electronic traceability system for fish sales will be fully implemented to ensure that all fish being sold or transported can be traced back to the trawler.

Natural Resources

Our overarching objective of securing our national energy supply will be a key driver in the development of Ireland's approach to hydrocarbon exploration and production.

We will:

- Encourage investment in oil and gas exploration off the Irish coast and optimise the value of any oil and gas finds for Ireland.
- Work to maximise the level of exploration activity, while ensuring a fair return to the State from these activities.
- Manage exploration licences in a manner that encourages timely exploration.
- Modernise and consolidate all mineral development legislation.

HEALTH

Promoting Good Health

The fundamental objective of public health policy is good health, and the most effective way of maximising good health is to prevent illness or treat it as early as possible.

We will invest comprehensively in health promoting activities and awareness campaigns to achieve higher life expectancy, better health status and faster recovery from illness.

- We will expedite the delivery of a National Strategy for Tackling Obesity, with a cross-departmental group to ensure implementation, with regular reports to Cabinet.
- We will prioritise and intensify measures to tackle alcohol and drug misuse among all sections of the population and in particular among young people. Specifically, we will:
 - Use the education system and public awareness campaigns to highlight the damage caused by binge drinking.
 - Put in place a fund for the provision of a countrywide network of youth cafes where young people can meet in a safe, legal, alcohol-free and healthy environment.
 - In recognition of the growth of home drinking and our continuing high rates of binge drinking, we will develop a code of practice on the sale of alcohol with the off-licence trade.
 - Use the taxation system to promote low alcohol or alcohol-free products.
- We will implement the recommendations of the Working Group on alcohol abuse established under Sustaining Progress.
- Double the penalties for all offences relating to the sale of alcohol to children, the purchase of alcohol for children and the breach of the restrictions on the presence of underage persons on licensed premises.
- Provide early intervention programmes in all social, health and justice services to ensure early detection and appropriate responses to high risk drinking.
- The Office of Tobacco Control will be mandated to carry out and publish a comprehensive review of anti-smoking programmes targeted at young people by all Departments and Agencies.
- We will seek to negotiate new wage agreements based on a CPI figure excluding tobacco.
- The recent development of a cervical cancer vaccine opens up the possibility of effectively ending cervical cancer within a few generations. We believe it should be available as a universal public health entitlement once recommended by experts.
- Consider health promotion campaigns highlighting such matters as the dangers of alcohol abuse and unhealthy eating habits.
- Mandate the HSE to publish a comprehensive report on the fluoridation of water.
- Promote greater regulation of complementary health.
- Promote co-existence of complementary and conventional medicine.
- Continue to encourage breastfeeding to achieve higher levels of the practice from continuing low-levels of uptake.
- Ensure that primary schools educate children about bodily positive self-image.
- Run a media campaign to help remove the stigma of mental illness.

Personal Health Check

We will develop a freely available and personalised national programme to provide for the prevention and early detection of illnesses for both men and women.

To be called the Personal Health Check, the new programme will be developed as follows:

- An expert group will develop guidelines for the Personal Health Check based on the best available national and international evidence of what works well.
- On reaching certain milestones determined by the expert group they will be invited to attend a GP or Primary Care Clinic for a Personal Health Check.
- General health examinations, and other tests recommended by the expert group, will be carried out.
- When the results are returned, those tested will receive an invitation to return for a consultation where the results will be explained and they will be given a plan relevant to them.
- Where the results show a serious concern, the person will immediately be referred to appropriate expert care.
- Implementation of such an ambitious plan will take time but we believe that the programme can be established and operating nationally within five years.
- The Expert Group will be established in 2007, with a requirement to report by mid-2008 at latest.
- Phased implementation of the Expert Group recommendations will begin urgently.

Putting Patients First

- We will initiate a periodic review of legislation to improve patient safety.
- We will also continue to ensure all new health legislation makes provision for whistleblowers where applicable.
- We will examine implementing an advisory charter of patients' rights similar to the European charter of patient rights.
- We will progressively introduce patient guarantees of what people can expect from their health service.
- We will bring forward and implement recommendations of the Commission on Patient Safety.

Primary Health Care

We will implement the €2.1 billion capital investment programme outlined in the NDP for the development of modern primary care facilities. Specifically, we will:

- Extend the GP out-of-hours service nationwide to ensure that patients can be seen within one hour of their call. This will give access to on duty GP care 24 hours a day. GPs will be fully equipped to ensure that their expertise and skills minimise the need for their patients to attend an A&E unit.
- Improve GP cover by developing primary health centres in socially deprived areas.
- Work with GPs to ensure constantly improving out of hours cover for patients.
- Ensure that there is a primary care team serving every community, with particular reference to new and rapidly growing areas. Five hundred new primary care teams will be funded by 2011. This will include an extension in front-line posts to ensure integrated, accessible services for patients in the community.
- Introduce improved supports for GPs who work in remote and disadvantaged communities – both for those starting out and those already established. These will include improved start up funding towards premises, equipment, security, professional support and cover.

GP Card/Medical Card

We will:

- Index the income thresholds for medical cards to increases in the average industrial wage. Implement an annual publicity campaign and make applications easier so as to increase uptake amongst those who are eligible for cards.
- We will double the income limit eligibility of parents of children under 6 years of age and treble them for parents of children with an intellectual disability under 18 years of age.

Hospitals/acute Care

We will ensure greater equality in access and care between private and public patients in the healthcare system and audit same to measure progress.

We will implement the €2.4 billion acute hospital capital programme outlined in the National Development Plan. Under this Programme, we will expand the range, quality and capacity of hospitals throughout the country and we will introduce key reforms in work-practices for the benefit of all patients.

We believe the interests of public patients must be protected and that the best way to do this is to invest in expanded services and to end practices which serve to reduce public capacity and make effective management difficult.

We are committed to improving acute medical services in hospitals and in the context of community local services to fast-track assessment and treatment for those most in need. We will also ensure that all new hospitals and units provide for an increase in the number of single rooms.

Hospital Beds

We will:

- Increase the number of dedicated public-only hospital beds by 1,500.
- Implement the plans for co-located facilities because this represents the quickest and most effective way of ensuring that public capacity is both increased and ring-fenced.
- Ensure that clear benefits to the public are identified and achieved in the hospitals co-location policy and, as a matter of good practice in public sector policy, we will carry out independent review of the policy following completion of the present programme commenced in 2005.
- We will reform use of beds in hospitals to ensure equity of access.

Waiting Times

- Ensure that the Patient Treatment Register is operated for all in and out-patient referrals. We will extend measures to ensure all patients have access to data concerning waiting times.
- Implement a proactive system whereby every person who is waiting for treatment for three months automatically receives a written offer of treatment.
- Allow Orthodontic cases to be referred to the NTPF by creating an “Orthodontic Fund” to treat children who have been waiting longest.
- Ensure that any child under five waiting more than three months for occupational or speech and language therapy, can access these services automatically through the National Treatment Purchase Fund.

Consultants

- We will work towards doubling the number of consultants to appoint an extra 2,000 and bringing the total number to 4,000. However, this must be on the basis of the full implementation of reformed work-practices.
- Specifically, we will appoint these new consultants on the basis:
 - That all contracted time will be personally worked, and;
 - A team-approach is implemented to ensure 24 hour availability of consultants to patients where medically necessary resulting in faster decision-making.

The continuing development of our hospital services depends on the reform of the consultants’ contracts. We believe in negotiated agreements, but the absence of one will not be allowed to frustrate the expansion in services.

Accident & Emergency/Local Injury Clinics

We want to ensure that only those in needs of the high level of expert attention available at an A&E department attend for treatment and that patients are assessed immediately and treated quickly. To achieve this:

- We will further increase the number of A&E consultants available round-the-clock in A&E departments.
- We will further develop chest pain and respiratory clinics to ease pressure on A&E.
- We will establish a national network of Local Injury Clinics. These will deal with cases which do not require the sort of urgent care which only a full A&E can provide.
- They will be staffed by doctors, nurses and other professionals who will provide speedy diagnosis, commence treatment immediately or refer patients for more urgent attention as required.
- They will be located in places which maximise public accessibility. In some cases this will be on hospital sites or within primary healthcare clinics.
- These clinics will work closely with primary care teams to ensure appropriate follow up and ongoing care.
- While final details will require more detailed expert input, we estimate that each Centre will require a start-up capital budget of up to €2 million and on-going recurrent funding of up to €400,000.
- Our target is for 20 of these clinics across the country within five years.

Hygiene/Infection Control

In the lifetime of the government, we will provide additional staffing to deal with Healthcare Acquired Infections (HAI), including in particular MRSA. We will :

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- Ensure the HIQA sets and enforces a clear standard on HAI and that the new system of licensing will put a strong emphasis in all infection control
- Significantly reduce HAI in our hospitals and take into account the need to guard against infection in the refurbishment of existing hospital and the construction of new hospitals.
- Establish a specific financial incentive which will reward hospitals that achieve excellence in hygiene standards.
- Continue to carry out regular hygiene audits without notice, at minimum annually, and publish the results.
- Introduce measures to help reduce the prescribing of antibiotics

Cancer Services

We will work to make the full range of cancer services accessible to patients throughout Ireland in accordance with best international practice.

- We will continue to implement the key recommendations of the National Cancer Strategy and prioritise development of hospice services.
- The Breast Check service will complete its national roll-out this year. We are committed to extending access to the programme to women not covered at present, in accordance with clinical guidelines.
- We will progress a national network for radiation oncology (radiotherapy) services over the next five years.
- We will introduce a new universal entitlement to the cervical cancer vaccine as outlined earlier.
- The Personal Health Check will include referral of men for early screening for prostate and other cancers as recommended by experts.
- The new Cancer Control strategy launched in 2006 will be fully funded in the NDP and we will establish Managed Cancer Control networks each serving a population of one million people.
- Networks will consist of primary, hospital, palliative and supportive care. Cancer Centres will lead and deliver the care required. We will significantly invest in diagnostic equipment and facilities for cancer patients.

Accountability

Through case-mix funding and other initiatives, there has been a substantial move to incentivise those hospitals which offer higher and more effective levels of care to the communities they serve. We are committed to continuing this programme. Regional balance and public accountability is a core element of our plan to develop services. We will ensure that an annual report of activity is prepared, published and widely distributed within each region.

Mental Health Services

In government we will:

- Invest in and fully implement “the Vision for Change Strategy” and provide further additional funding to support the recovery model of Mental Health service provision.
- Ringfence funds from the sale of existing mental hospitals, estimated to be approximately €800 million, to fund community-based services.
- Ensure that multi-disciplinary Community Mental Health Teams provide services based on need, in the community, the home and through assertive outreach.
- Increase the number of postgraduate training places for clinical psychologists.
- Provide community alternatives to psychiatric inpatient care for young people with special education needs.

Suicide

The heartache and turmoil associated with suicide has become an all too common feature of modern society.

In government we will:

- Implement, as a matter of urgency, the recommendations of Reach Out - the national strategy for action for suicide prevention - and the Recommendations of the Joint Oireachtas Sub-Committee on the High Level of Suicide.
- Adopt a target of reducing the rate of suicide by 20% by 2012.
- Develop initiatives to target those most at risk, promote well-being, raise awareness and reduce stigma.
- Improve services and supports for marginalised groups, particularly those with mental health difficulties.
- Increase the range of supports to families and communities affected by suicide and bereavement.
- Collate accurate data on suicide and conduct and fund research on prevention methods.

Community and Continuing Care

Over the next five years, €2.1 billion will be invested in the Primary, Community and Continuing Care capital programme and we will:

- Continue to implement measures to ensure the availability of real alternatives to hospital for those who require lengthy convalescence.
- Starting in 2008, increase funding to the NTPF on an annual basis over the lifetime of the Government to secure long-term care, step down beds and rehabilitation services for patients. This additional funding will be ring-fenced for the above purposes and will be set at €20 million for the first year.

Maximising Independence

We believe that all older people should have the opportunity to stay in their own home for as long as possible. This is what our older people want and we will support them in their choice. We will also support their family carers to continue their caring role. We will help local and voluntary organisations to establish and run community based facilities that will provide the care services necessary to support older people. We will strengthen and develop stroke rehabilitation services. We will introduce a community led pilot scheme to counter the social isolation of the elderly in rural Ireland.

Nursing Homes

The demand for nursing home places will continue to increase and the public is entitled to expect high quality and appropriate supports for all residents. We will only fund places in nursing homes that meet the highest standards of nursing care set by HIQA. While our main focus will be on providing more and better home care services to allow people to remain at home, we will provide for ten new 50 bed Community Nursing Units in the next five years.

We will expand the system of inspection to ensure more comprehensive and regular inspections. All inspection reports will be available to residents and their families and published. We are committed to a standard framework for admission to and payment for nursing home facilities. We will take the financial burden for the residential care of their elderly parents from families.

We will implement the Fair Deal for nursing home care costs from the start of 2008.

Palliative Care

We will ensure that the needs of all people who require palliative care are met whether this is needed at home, in the community or in a specialised hospice.

We are committed, within the next five years, to removing the regional disparities in the provision and funding of palliative care. We recognise the tremendous contribution of the Irish Hospice Foundation and the various community organisations providing palliative care and we will continue to work with these bodies to improve services.

Overall Structural Reform

Three years into the structural reforms it is reasonable to review how effectively HSE is operating and, especially, to ensure that team work and communication are working to the fullest extent.

We are committed to carrying out such a review and to ensuring that staff have an opportunity to propose ways in which the HSE can work more effectively.

Nurses

We are committed to the further development of the nursing profession.

With nurse-practitioners beginning to operate within the system and a range of other changes, we see the status of nurses increasing – just as the number of nursing posts will increase with our proposed capacity increases. We are committed to keeping open the benchmarking process to nurses.

Doctors

Our next steps forward for health will require a further significant increase in doctor numbers in all parts of the system.

- We are committed to implementing the restructuring of medical education including an increase in training places and post-graduate medical degrees.
- We are committed to implementing the Fottrell report recommendations on undergraduate places in medicine.
- In the context of social partnership, we will examine the compulsory retirement age of 65 for GMS contract holders.
- We are committed to continuing to provide more front-line staff in Health as needed on a case by case basis.

Other Health Professionals

Our next steps forward will ensure that we increase the supply of professionals needed to meet our ambitious plans to develop new services for persons with disabilities, and to improve and sustain our primary healthcare and hospital services.

Health Insurance

We will continue to require risk equalization that is equitable and ensures an efficient market.

We will take measures also to support a competitive health insurance market and to continue support for community rating so that health insurance remains affordable for older and sicker people.

Cross-Border Health Initiatives

We will continue to deepen all-Ireland cooperation in relation to health services for the benefit of communities on both sides of the border and maximise the use of valuable facilities and expertise in both jurisdictions. In particular, we will explore the possibility of cross-border cooperation in acute patient care.

EDUCATION

This Government sees education as central to achieving our goals of protecting and growing Ireland's prosperity and ensuring greater social inclusion.

Our key overall objectives are:

- To implement significant further improvements in the human and financial resources available to our schools;
- To ensure that the quality of buildings and equipment available in all parts of the education system are significantly improved;
- To make each element of the system more inclusive and responsive to the needs of marginalised groups; and
- To develop our third level institutions as world-leaders in research and development, helping Ireland to maintain and build on its undoubted progress.

Specifically, the government is committed to spending an additional €350 million per year on new service developments in education.

Extra Teachers and Teacher Training

We will:

- Increase the number of primary teachers by at least 4,000. This will enable us to reduce class sizes. The staffing schedule will be reduced from a general rule of at least one teacher for every 27 pupils in 2007/08, by one point a year, to one for every 24 children by 2010/11.
- Where amalgamation is not possible, provide a classroom assistant to the one-teacher schools.
- Prioritise reductions in the size of classes in the core subjects of Irish, English and Maths at second level.
- Reform the initial teacher-training programmes, ensure that all teacher-training colleges reserve places for students from disadvantaged areas, and prioritise high quality in-career professional development for teachers and principals.
- Increase the range of services provided by the education centres and expand the role of the regional offices in working at a local level with various groups and agencies.

Improved Funding For Our Schools

We will:

- Increase day-to-day funding for our schools in real terms, and will double the capitation grant for primary schools. Grants to schools for the employment of support staff such as secretaries and caretakers will also be increased significantly.
- Complete the process of equalisation of funding at second level within two years.
- Examine the provision of waste and water allowances to schools with charges becoming effective after these are exceeded.

High Quality School Buildings & Planning For New Schools

We will:

- Invest €4.5 billion in providing new schools and improving existing ones;
- Ensure that no rezoning of land for residential development can take place without a prior commitment of an appropriate proportion of land for schools;
- Establish a Developing Areas Unit in the Department of Education to liaise with local authorities, identify where new schools are needed and ensure that they are delivered in the fastest possible timeframe;
- Put in place clear procedures which local authorities must follow to ensure proper planning for new schools and extensions;
- Improve the arrangements for acquiring sites;
- Ensure maximum use of the top-class standard designs for primary schools that have been developed to deliver new buildings in the fastest timeframe possible;
- Prioritise energy efficiency and eco-design in new school buildings;
- Promote and support the use of school facilities by community groups and other appropriate services and design new schools in order to facilitate multi-use.
- Abolish the local contribution to building projects and to the rental of accommodation
- Increase the Minor Works grant to improve funding to schools to maintain their buildings in good condition.
- Ensure that where the State builds a new school on land which it owns, the building will be in the ownership of the Department of Education.

Empowering Principals as Leaders of the School Community

We will:

- Seek agreement through partnership for a facility to allow those who have served as principals for more than a certain number of years to return to fulltime teaching duties, while maintaining some benefits;
- Increase the number of release days for teaching principals at primary level and expand the pilot scheme of substitute cover for principals' release days;
- Provide improved training options for principals, middle management and aspiring school leaders;
- Review the role of middle management and put a new system in place;
- Reduce the threshold for the appointment of administrative deputy principals to primary schools;
- Substantially increase funding the ancillary and support services grants so that principals have better administrative support; and

- Maximise the use of IT to cut down on administration and put a database in place to track primary pupils.

After Hours & Holiday Time Programmes

We will:

- Invest in and support the roll-out of school-age childcare, whereby children will be given access to a range of after-school and holiday time activities, with a major focus on sports and the arts.
- This will help to meet a significant and growing need of working parents, enable children to benefit from a broad range of positive activities, and ensure that schools and other facilities are being better utilised.

Supporting Parents and School Boards

We will:

- Continue to promote parental involvement at all levels;
- Improve the information available to parents;
- Ensure that new Boards of Management that will take up office in late 2007 have access to training and support on a wide range of issues; and
- Develop a manual to support boards in their work and publish it on the web.

Promoting Students' All-round Development

We will:

- Provide a dedicated fund for investment in PE facilities for schools, make PE mandatory at second level, and put a revised PE curriculum for senior cycle students in place.
- Provide PE equipment grants to schools every 3 years.
- Examine the potential to introduce second level examinations in PE.
- Promote greater sharing of school and community sports facilities and make it a condition of the Sports Capital Programme that facilities be made available to schools where appropriate.
- Increase the role of the arts as part of a well-rounded educational experience and provide funding for arts in education.
- Increase the number of guidance counsellors at second level.
- Ensure that education is provided in road safety at different stages of the school system, including a specific transition year course.
- Involve Community Health professionals in the delivery of Relationships and Sexuality Education and provide greater support for teachers in this area through improved teaching resources and access to training.
- Require all primary schools to implement the Stay Safe child abuse protection programme.
- Include the national anthem in the primary school curriculum, teach school children about the role and significance of our national flag, and instil in them respect for the place of other nations' anthems and flags.
- Ensure that schools help to make our children environmentally aware and include the Green Schools Programme as part of any Whole School Evaluation.
- Encourage the establishment of student councils and provide for formal liaison arrangements between them and their school's board of management.

Curricular Change To Meet Skills Needs and Ensuring A Broader Range Of Educational Opportunities

We will:

- Prioritise the introduction of new curricula in Maths and in Leaving Certificate Physics and Chemistry, supported by teacher training.
- Complete the senior cycle review that is currently being undertaken by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment.
- Review the format and content of transition year.
- Ring-fence funding for science laboratories, improve science equipment in our schools, and ensure a greater focus on high quality science education at all levels.
- Implement new Leaving Cert curricula in engineering, architectural technology, economics, agricultural science and art.
- Put in place a new senior cycle course in the area of politics and society;
- Increase resources and services for gifted children.
- Encourage more schools to offer alternative curricula such as the Junior Certificate Schools' Programme and the Leaving Certificate Applied course.
- While encouraging higher rates of school completion, increase access to alternative educational provision for young people who do not wish to continue in the formal school system. Financial and other support for such centres will also be improved and put on a multi-annual basis.
- We will increase the number of Youthreach places in line with our *Towards 2016* commitments and will support the development of similar services for younger students who discover that the mainstream second level school is not suitable for them.

Promoting the Irish Language In Our Schools & Colleges

We will:

- Improve teacher training, reform the curriculum to place greater emphasis on the spoken language, and provide an enhanced support service for schools.
- Fund the development of a comprehensive range of materials and resources to support teaching through Irish.
- Provide a scholarship scheme for children from disadvantaged areas to attend courses in the Gaeltacht and funding summer courses in the children's own local areas.

Schools ICT

We will:

- Implement a comprehensive Schools ICT Strategy, supported by a dedicated capital investment programme and addressing schools' needs for technical support and maintenance. It will also cover the training needs of teachers.
- Give the opportunity to second level students to acquire an ECDL qualification in computers by the time they leave school.

Tackling Disadvantage & Improving Literacy and Numeracy Skills

We will:

- Complete the roll-out of the DEIS Action Plan to ensure a comprehensive package of targeted supports for schoolchildren in the most disadvantaged areas. This will include rolling out successful services such as school completion and home school community liaison to all schools involved in the new school support programme under DEIS.
- Prioritise funding under the National Childcare Investment Programme to provide pre-school places for children who will be attending schools identified under DEIS as serving the most disadvantaged communities.
- Increase coordination between state agencies that provide help for families at risk.
- Ensure that all children will be tested in literacy and numeracy at two stages during their primary school education.
- Prioritise early intervention to improve literacy and numeracy skills in disadvantaged areas, with special intensive reading and maths programmes for children who are having difficulties and a focus on family literacy.
- Provide increased funding for school libraries and greatly improve the level of support provided for book loan schemes.
- Recruit extra staff to the Educational Welfare Board and the National Educational Psychological Service, both of which will prioritise disadvantaged schools.

Special Education

We will:

- Prioritise early assessment and increase the number of educational psychologists in the Department of Education's NEPS service to 200 by 2009;
- Expand pre-school provision around the country to ensure early intervention;
- Provide each child with special needs with the right to an Individual Education Plan. This will ensure that each child has a tailored programme to meet their unique individual needs. In the case of children with autism, the Plan will enable them to benefit from a range of teaching approaches, including PECS, ABA and TEACCH, as appropriate;
- Commit to long-term funding for the 12 centres that are currently in the ABA pilot scheme subject to agreement with the Department of Education on standards that will enable the Department to support them as primary schools for children with autism.
- Implement the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act in full;
- Put in place a new appeals system;
- Continue to expand the number of special classes in our schools and open new special schools;
- Develop special schools as centres of excellence and outreach facilities and allow for dual enrolment so that children can attend both a special school and a mainstream school as appropriate;
- Improve second level provision for children with special needs;
- Provide improved training for teachers;
- Provide a central database of suitably trained personnel seeking employment as home tutors to assist parents in finding someone for their child;
- Train more speech and language and occupational therapists. The HSE will ensure that there is much greater access to these services.
- Ensure greater coordination between the education and health services in supporting children with special needs.

Promoting Successful Integration In Our Schools

We will:

- Further increase the number of language support teachers from 1,450 to 1,800.
- Improve teacher training and give extra supports to schools with large numbers of students with different languages and cultures to improve home-school links.
- Provide access to English language classes for adult immigrants.
- Ensure that our education system and personnel are well-equipped for a multi-cultural society.

School Buses

We will:

- Prioritise further investment in the school transport to ensure a high quality service.
- Review the school transport system, including the catchment boundaries.

Expanding Adult Education Provision

We will:

- Expand the number of adult literacy training places by 4,000, on top of the extra 3,000 places being put in place in 2007, and provide dedicated funding for English language training for targeted groups.
- Increase funding for adult literacy with the following priorities:
 - Outreach services to address the needs of the most vulnerable, including migrants, with more intensive and concentrated tuition;
 - Improved provision for initial assessment, certification and progression;
 - Continuing professional development for adult literacy tutors, volunteers and other Further Education staff working with learners at FETAC levels 1 – 4;
 - Improved guidance and other ancillary supports, including child care and accommodation; and
 - Provision for evaluation of existing programmes with particular regard to policy objectives and targets
- Increase the number of places on the Back to Education Initiative to 10,000 and expand the VTOS scheme.

Strengthening the Youth Work Sector

We will:

- Provide extra resources to progress the implementation of the National Youth Work Development Plan and the Youth Work Act, on a phased and prioritized basis;
- Support a new Youth Work Development plan for the period 2008-2012;
- Continue to increase support for youth clubs, particularly in disadvantaged areas; Prioritise rigorous child protection standards in the youth work sector.

Improved Opportunities in Further and Higher Education

We will:

- Further increase third level participation rates, with a special focus on those from disadvantaged areas.
- Introduce a new system of means-tested free fees for approved part-time courses. Together with incentives for colleges to offer more flexible and diverse course structures, this will enable more people with work or family commitments to avail of opportunities at third level.
- Enable more students to qualify for the top-up grant.
- Evaluate the success of the new alternative entry arrangements for medical education with a view to determining if similar changes should be made in the application procedures for other high-points courses.
- Promote more explicit arrangements for student transfer between institutes of technology and universities and open new routes of access from the further education sector to the third level sector.
- Develop the further education sector to enable it to play a strong role in providing employment relevant education and training opportunities and serve as a gateway to higher education. Increased investment will be provided to support improvements in the sector and priority will be given to addressing the capital and equipment needs of the PLC colleges.
- Provide a multi-annual capital fund of € billion for higher education institutions to support investment in the development of modern campus facilities with leading edge teaching and learning infrastructure, and to ensure that institutions have the capacity to meet emerging needs while accommodating growing numbers of students accessing higher education.
- Prioritise quality assurance in our colleges and provide targeted funding to support the student role in the QA process.
- Appoint two student representatives to each of the HEA and the NQAI.
- Fully examine Waterford Institute of Technology's case for university status.

Developing A Strong Fourth Level Research Sector

We will:

- Continue to reshape, reform and strengthen undergraduate education to support the skills needs of society and the development of fourth level education.
- Dramatically increase the research capacity of our third level colleges.
- In doubling our output of PhDs by 2013, sustain and enhance quality through the establishment of graduate schools to achieve structured quality PhD training and enhanced postgraduate skills.
- Ensure that the support for research in the humanities and social sciences is developed to also achieve a doubling of PhD numbers.
- Further develop the Programme for Research in Third-Level Institutions (PRTLTI) to support the expansion of high-quality research places.
- Develop flexible and attractive career paths for researchers.
- Ensure that there is enhanced industry/academia collaboration to benefit business and secure growth.

CHILDREN

We will ensure that all of our children have the opportunity to enjoy childhood and develop to their full potential.

Constitutional Amendment

We believe the fundamental law of our land should fully reflect our commitment to value and protect childhood. That is why we have proposed the inclusion in our Constitution of a new dedicated Article on Children. Under its provisions the State will acknowledge and affirm the natural and imprescriptible rights of all children. Nothing in our proposed article will undermine the role of parents. However, it will ensure that the best interests of the child are put centre stage in the adoption and care systems and in all custody disputes. Specifically, it will put an end to the tragic position that forbids children in long-term care or the children of a marriage from being adopted by loving parents.

The new Article will also greatly strengthen the protection we afford to children by permitting the carefully regulated exchange of information about suspected child abusers and by allowing the Oireachtas to introduce legislation which would make it impossible for those who take sexual advantage of children to claim the defense of honest mistake about the age of their victims.

We will establish an all-party Committee to examine the proposed constitutional amendment with a view to deepening consensus on this matter.

We will continue through legislation to implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child through our laws, and ensure the remaining sections of the Children's Act are implemented in full, without delay.

Childcare

Over the next five years we will:

- Increase the rate of the Early Childcare Supplement and Child Benefit.
- Ensure that every child has access to a pre-school place by 2012.
- Through the investment of €1.3 billion provided for in the NDP, create an extra 50,000 new childcare places by 2010.
- Continue to support community childcare facilities through capital and staffing grants, and provide funding on a multi-annual basis to allow for more effective planning.
- Ensure a supply of affordable childcare premises by requiring housing developers to make a monetary contribution or provide a site to local authorities for childcare facilities, the location and type of which will be decided in consultation with the County Childcare Committees. We will also require local authorities to provide childcare facilities as part of their social housing plans, subject to an examination of existing supply.
- Continue to provide tax relief and capital grants for investment in childcare facilities.
- Where possible, and where there is evidence of need, provide childcare facilities on the same site as or adjacent to primary schools.
- Prioritise expansion of pre-school facilities for children with intellectual disabilities.
- Implement the National Childcare Training Strategy and work with providers to support the delivery of quality early education. We will continue to provide tax incentives to childminders to encourage registration and support the development of networking and training opportunities.

Giving Parents More Time With Their Children

Over the next five years we will:

- Increase paid maternity leave by five weeks and make all leave after the first 26 weeks available to either parent.
- Work with the social partners to promote the greater availability of family-friendly work practices.
- Examine the possibility of introducing paternity benefit.
- Examine the possibility of shared parental leave.

A New System of School Age Childcare

We recognise the need for care places for the school going children of working parents.

- We will further invest in and support the roll-out of affordable school-age childcare, whereby children will be given access to a range of after-school and holiday time activities, with a major focus on sports and the arts.
- Services will be provided in schools or in other suitable premises, and will operate until 6pm and on a full-day basis during school holidays.

Health and Well-being

- We will continue to support community groups, and other appropriate family support structures to promote better parenting.
- We will promote preventative medicine and early detection through medical checks in schools, including checks for allergies and asthma.
- We will develop a national sexual health strategy and update the sex education programme in schools and involve community health professional in the delivery of the programme.
- We will promote mental health through school visits and information programmes by the community mental health assessment teams.
- We will promote healthy eating and exercise programmes; we will implement the recommendations of the National Taskforce on obesity; and include dieticians in primary care teams.

Tackling Childhood Disadvantage

We know that early intervention is the key to improving the lives of children and their families in severely disadvantaged areas. We need to change the way we work with families in these areas.

- We will increase the rate of the Early Childhood Supplement and Child Benefit, while building on the Qualified Child Allowance.
- We will accelerate the establishment of Children's Services Committees in each county so that all the statutory agencies work together in a strategic way and use resources more efficiently for the benefit of children.
- We will build on the experience of ground-breaking initiatives for disadvantaged children, such as those undertaken with Atlantic Philanthropies under the Early Intervention and Prevention Programme by applying the lessons learnt from these projects, in a targeted way, to economically and socially disadvantaged communities across the country.
- We will bring together statutory and voluntary agencies in a collaborative approach to the delivery of services with the engagement of the communities.

Recreation and Play

- Over the next five years, we will continue to invest in playgrounds around the country under the National Play Policy so that every child in every community has reasonable access to at least one modern playground.
- We will put in place a fund for the provision of a countrywide network of youth cafes where young people can meet in a safe, legal and healthy environment.
- We will ensure that residential areas are geared more towards the need of children and incorporate sufficient space to safely play, socialise, walk and cycle.

Child Protection

- The proposed amendment to the Constitution will further strengthen our ability to protect our children by allowing the Oireachtas to legislate for the exchange of information about suspected child abusers. It will also allow for the creation of offences of absolute or strict liability so that those who sexually abuse our children will no longer be able to claim mistake about their victims' age as a defence in court.
- We will provide extra resources to the Garda vetting service.
- We will develop an all-Ireland approach to child protection. We will put in place the necessary structures and systems to increase cooperation on vetting and the exchange of all relevant information about those who work or seek to work with children and vulnerable adults.
- We will require all primary schools to implement the Stay Safe programme.

Foster Care

- Our constitutional amendment will give children in long-term foster care a second chance by allowing for them to be adopted by their foster families if it is in their best interests.

Youth Justice

We will:

- Fund the implementation of a range of new community sanctions which came into force last March as an alternative to detention and which will be operated by the Probation Service. These community sanctions will include sanctions against the parents of offending youths.
- Double the number of Garda Youth Diversion Projects and fund the development of other programmes for children who offend.
- Invest in the provision of appropriate detention facilities for youth offenders.

BETTER SUPPORTS FOR OLDER PEOPLE

On top of the substantial changes outlined in the health chapter, we are determined to take a further series of significant steps forward for older people.

Pensions

The Green Paper on Pensions represents a comprehensive examination of the challenges and options facing Ireland in ensuring that all our people have adequate pension coverage. With half of the working population not part of any personal or occupational pension scheme and few having the security of defined benefit schemes, it is vital that major steps are taken in the coming years to improve pensions.

We will:

- Increase the basic State pension by around 50% to at least €300 per week by 2012.

- We will seek to develop imaginative proposals in the context of the Green Paper (the publication of which is a commitment under *Towards 2016*) and in consultation with the social partners, to provide an SSIA type scheme in an effort to make supplementary pension provision more attractive to those on low incomes.
- Aim to secure the target of at least 50% of pre-retirement earnings from all sources including social welfare supports, private and occupational pensions, and savings and investments.
- Complete the scheme introduced in Budget 2007 to provide a personal pension payment for pensioner spouses in receipt of the Qualified Adult Allowance. The payment will be set at the level of a full rate Non-Contributory State Pension and the income limits will be improved to enable more people to qualify for it. The role and economic contribution of spouses working on the farm will be better recognised within the social insurance system.
- Extend the Age Allowance to Qualified Adults over 80 years old.
- Remove anomalies identified in the pension system.
- Ensure women are treated fairly in pension provision.

Improving Income and Employment Conditions

The Government is determined to improve the income and employment conditions of older people. We appreciate that compulsory retirement does not adequately reflect many people's abilities or expectations. Those reaching retirement age should be allowed to retire if they wish, but those who would prefer to say at work should be facilitated in doing so.

We will:

- Introduce phased retirement which allows workers a greater say in their retirement age.
- Increase the State Pension for every year that a person over 66 delays taking it. Thus, additional PRSI contributions made after the age of 66 will be added to the pension when it is drawn down.
- Extend the amount those in receipt of the State Non-Contributory Pension are allowed to earn without it affecting their pension entitlement.
- Guard against age-related discrimination in the workplace.

National Strategy for Older People

In light of the growing involvement of many Departments and agencies in this area, and of the successful model for developing policy relating to children and people with disabilities, we will develop in conjunction with the recognised voluntary groups in this area a New National Positive Ageing Strategy to include:

- The development of operational plans by Government Departments clearly setting out objectives relating to older people.
- Joined up thinking on initiatives serving older people.
- Ongoing mechanisms to monitor progress and identify challenges.
- Liaise with recognised voluntary groups in the area.
- Consideration of the appointment of an Ombudsman for Older People.

We will also designate a Minister of State for Older People who will be a member of the cabinet committee on social inclusion.

In addition, the development of quality transport systems in rural and urban areas and the expansion of the Rural Transport Initiative will improve accessibility for older people.

Education and Retraining for Older People

We will:

- Set up a training programme for all those over 50 for the teaching of computer literacy.
- Support the extension of initiatives such as IT training in care settings, senior cyber cafés, senior web sites and mature learner groups.
- Through the availability of mature student places and the introduction of a new system of means-tested free fees for third level education, enable more older people to go to College.

Making It Easier for Older People to Stay in Their Own Homes

It is in everyone's best interests that older people are supported and encouraged to remain self reliant and to remain actively involved in the well-being of themselves and their families, friends and the wider community. Central to this is the provision and support for older people to stay in their own homes for as long as possible. We will:

- Continue to provide support services for homecare.
- Extend the Slán Abhaile programme. This programme provides older people with practical alternatives to long stay residential care by providing enhanced home support services.
- Provide funding to local authorities for the provision of specialised housing units for older people which is both affordable and appropriate to their housing needs.
- Facilitate the building of retirement villages and introduce on a pilot basis integrated purpose-built neighbourhoods for older people in existing communities, similar to, for example, the development of Westgate, Ballincollig, Co. Cork.

SOCIAL AFFAIRS

Welfare Reform

- Integrate the tax and social welfare systems fully to allow for more efficient data and money transfer mechanisms and provide for a fully integrated PPS number.
- Maintain policy of phasing and using transition payments for those coming off social welfare. Complete the scheme introduced in Budget 2007 to provide a personal pension payment for pensioner spouses in receipt of the Qualified Adult Allowance. The payment will be set at the level of a full rate Non-Contributory State Pension and the income limits will be improved to enable more people to qualify for it.
- Ensure that women are treated fairly in the Social Welfare code and examine the proposals in the Green Paper on Pensions in this regard.
- The role and economic contribution of spouses working on the farm will be better recognised within the social insurance system.
- Continue to maintain the value of the lowest rate of social welfare payments as agreed in the National Action Plan on Social Inclusion.

Carers

In the next five years, the Government will:

- Further increase eligibility for the Carers' Allowance.
- Double the non-means-tested Respite Care Grant to €3,000 per person cared for.
- Extend the National Fuel Allowance Scheme to cover eligible carers.
- Ensure a National Carers' Strategy focusing on supporting informal and family carers in the community will be developed by end 2007. There will be appropriate consultation with the social partners.

Lone Parents

The Government will implement a range of reforms to income support, including removal of the cohabitation restriction, replacing Lone Parents' Allowance with a new and improved family friendly allowance, and relaxing restrictions on work while retaining the social welfare payment.

Child Income Support

The Government will continue to prioritise the interests of families with children.

The government will:

- Amalgamate Qualified Child Allowances and Family Income Supplements in order to develop a second tier of income support targeted at the poorest families.
- Continue to increase Child Benefit.
- Implement significant improvements to the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance and the School Meals Programme.

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Rent Supplement Scheme

The standard means test for Rent Supplement will be kept under review and we will provide enhanced financial incentives to take up part-time employment, training, education or other progression items – minimising where possible, the impact of the sudden withdrawal of social welfare payments. The emphasis will be on the provision of appropriate long-term housing solutions rather than on moving retention thresholds at which some or all of the social welfare payment is lost.

- We will also initiate a feasibility study on reforming rent supplement.
- We will urgently examine the development of a mortgage support system for people on low incomes in order to reduce long-term reliance on rent supplement.
- We will ensure that people on the Rental Accommodation Scheme are pro-actively helped to move to housing accommodation appropriate to their individual needs

Coverage for Farm Spouses

- The role and economic contribution of spouses working on the farm will be better recognised within the social insurance system, following on from Budget 2007 which allowed recipients of Farm Assist to make PRSI contributions for the first time.

Disability

The Government will:

- Invest further in the Citizens' Information Board to enable them to engage advocacy officials to assist people with disabilities in accessing their entitlements.

Free Travel

The Government will:

- Urgently examine the introduction of Free Travel for Irish citizens of pension age particularly those resident in the UK when visiting Ireland, and press the European Commission to examine a similar EU wide scheme. As part of the modernisation of customer services, replace the existing paper travel pass with a plastic card which can be used on all public transport services which offer the facility of free travel.

Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS)

- The success of the Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) will be further enhanced by the establishment under legislation of a new structure with national leadership for the 21st century which maximises and recognises the current local voluntary involvement together with a strong professional role aimed at continuing to provide strong and confidential support for its clients.
- MABS will also be given a central role in increasing access to affordable credit for low income earners and social welfare customers.

Office of Social inclusion

- Continue to support the Office of Social Inclusion and review the effectiveness of the poverty proofing mechanisms currently being used.

Family Support

- We will continue to fully resource the Family Support Agency and its programmes of Counselling, Family Resource Centres, etc.

DISABILITY

This Government is determined to continue to prioritise the interests of people with disabilities over the next five years, through a series of significant measures. We are committed to ensuring that the Strategy is driven and managed from a whole of Government perspective and it will be overseen and supported by the Department of An Taoiseach. This Government, will for each year of the Programme for Government, set out the objectives and outcomes to be reached in the NDS having regard to the vision and long term goals for people with disabilities as set out in *Towards 2016*. This approach will be properly monitored and we will ensure that at least half of the strategy is implemented by 2010.

Health & Children

We will:

- Commence, by June 2007, the provision for an independent assessment of need for all children with disabilities under five years as a legal right.
- Build on this by providing a legal right to independent assessment of need for all persons with disabilities.
- Implement appropriate standards in service delivery to people with disabilities.
- Improve data and information gathering with the health services in order to more effectively plan and deliver health services to people with disabilities.
- In addition to redeveloping the National Rehabilitation Hospital in Dún Laoghaire, we will also increase the existing rehabilitation bed capacity.

Education

We will:

- Complete the roll out of the Education For Persons With Special Educational Needs Act, giving all children with special needs the right to an Individual Education Plan to ensure the best outcome for them, and putting in place a new appeals procedure.
- Ensure that all teachers and assistants have access to specialist training.
- Provide for improved access to lifelong learning for adults with disabilities.

Communications

We will:

- Fast forward subtitling and sign language interpretation targets for people who are deaf or hard of hearing, and audio description for people who are blind or visually impaired.
- Ensure An Post will address access issues at company owned post offices within two years.

Enterprise and Employment

We will:

- Put in place a comprehensive employment strategy for people with disabilities which will help people into work in all sectors.

- Ensure the implementation of the quota for the employment of people with disabilities in the public sector.
- Allow people with disabilities to work without losing key essential medical card cover after 3 years.
- Ensure that people with disabilities have full access to accessible vocational training.
- Provide access to flexible and responsive supports and programmes to enable people with disabilities to gain, retain and progress in employment.
- Ensure the 3% disability employment target for public services is met, and further boost disability employment by providing more funding to programmes such as the FÁS Wage Subsidy Scheme and the Workplace Equipment Adaptation grant (WEAG).

Environment & Local Government

We will:

- Make public buildings, footpaths, parks, information and services more accessible to people with disabilities, with real targets set and achieved.
- Plan from the outset for accessibility of public services and local authority facilities.
- Reform the Disabled Persons Grant Scheme to improve equity and targeting and to ensure that when work is completed under the scheme the house will be lifetime adapted for the disabled person.
- Examine ways of assisting those needing to change housing because of care and/or disability needs.
- Enforce building regulations to ensure appropriate accessibility for new buildings, as well as buildings which undergo major refurbishment.
- Ensure that developers are reminded at pre-planning stage of their obligations to make buildings accessible.

Welfare

We will:

- Offer people with disabilities further improved pathways to participation in employment or education, avoiding the benefits trap.
- Implement the Citizens Information Act, which provides for an independent personal advocacy service for people with disabilities.
- Continue to make improvements in the support for Carers.
- Examine a needs assessment protocol for family carers, incorporating health and social issue, and see how the shortfall in places for people with intellectual disabilities in need of respite and day-care services can be addressed.
- Publish a review of the Cost of Disability payment.

Transport

We will:

- Implement our strategy for making public transport accessible, with detailed actions for implementation in the areas of air, bus, taxi, rail and sea transport.
- Ensure all public transport is accessible and that cities have 100% wheelchair accessible taxi fleets.
- Address illegal parking in disabled car park spaces through enforcement, increased fines and public awareness.
- Review the eligibility criteria for disabled driver and disabled passenger scheme and other adaptation schemes.

ASYLUM, IMMIGRATION AND INTEGRATION

We understand that further significant multi-agency action is required to ensure that a comprehensive immigration policy is implemented and that our asylum system is robust to ensure that our new residents are integrated within the wider community.

Asylum

We recognise that asylum is a complex, long-term issue that requires action at national, European and international levels. We will ensure that Ireland fully meets its obligations under the 1951 Geneva Convention and other international human rights organisations, to which Ireland belongs. In addition we will:

- Integrate the present asylum and pre-deportation examinations into one streamlined process that will deal with cases in a speedy manner.
- Ensure that the functions currently carried out by the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner (ORAC) are subsumed into the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS).
- Establish a new body with an expanded remit, the Protection Review Tribunal, to replace the Refugee Appeals Tribunal. The Protection Review Tribunal will ensure that applicants continue to have access to a fair appeals process, while providing additional powers to the Chairperson to ensure greater consistency in decisions across the system.
- Act to uphold the integrity of the asylum applications system by providing for a more effective removals system for failed applicants.

Immigration

A fair and strategic immigration policy is imperative to sustaining a strong economy. We welcome legal immigrants who come here to work to support Ireland's development and we will help them to become full and active participants in Irish life.

We will

- Speedily review and enact the proposed Immigration, Residence and Protection Bill. The Bill will:
 - overhauling the body of Irish immigration legislation which dates back to 1935.
 - set out in a clear and integrated approach, the whole process for foreign nationals coming to the State, staying here and, when necessary, being required to leave.
- Consider - in the context of the Bill - allowing partners of permit holders to work following reunification and permanent residency.
- Ensure advice and assistance are provided in appropriate languages at ports of entry and that legal aid is provided for immigration cases.
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- Further develop the scheme for family reunification for family members of non-EEA national workers in the State.
- Introduce a scheme for establishing a status of long-term resident which will apply to persons with more than five years' residence in the State.
- Progress in the context of the Employment Permits Act 2006, the introduction of a "green card" or permanent labour migration system for people with certain skills.
- Complete the phased implementation of the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service.
- Ensure a visibly independent appeal process

Integration

We understand the need to ensure that our new residents are welcomed and that effective integration is supported. Therefore, we will:

- Develop a national integration policy, based on equality principles and taking a revised and broader view of social inclusion which builds on the experience of other countries.
- Appoint a Minister of State to implement the national integration policy. The Office will bring together in one administrative unit key officials from relevant government departments who provide services to immigrants.
- Increase the number of language support teachers to 1,800 and review language requirements across government.
- Continue to promote national campaigns aimed at challenging racism and promoting understanding of diversity and fund campaigns that educate the Irish public about the role of immigration in Irish society.
- Support the services offered by ethnic-led non-governmental organisations working with the immigrant community, in particular those which provide for the educational, cultural and linguistic needs of migrant workers.

COMMUNITY

This Government recognises the importance and value of strong local communities. To ensure that facet of Irish life remains strong we will initiate funding for a new scheme called the Community Development Plan.

The Community Development Plan

We will implement proposals for a Community Development Plan designed to deliver community facilities such as playgrounds, community centres, local markets, recycling, sports and recreational facilities throughout the country.

The Plan will be underpinned by a €150 million Community Development Fund to be established over a five-year period.

Creating Vibrant Rural Communities

Vibrant rural communities are vital to the future of our nation.

Over the next five years, we will:

- Establish the new Programme for Rural Enterprise Development under the Rural Development Plan 2007-2013
- Ensure that services being delivered for towns under the Community Development Plan above are easily accessible to rural communities.
- Greatly enhance and extend Rural Transport Initiative nationwide.
- Invest in the provision of broadband in rural areas.
- Double funding for the CLÁR Programme to enable rural infrastructure deficits to be tackled.
- Establish Community and Development Agencies as a 'one-stop shop' for advice on grant supports, business opportunities, training and development, and to manage grant spending under the new EU fund for rural development.
- Conduct an 'enterprise audit' to review the use of existing and redundant agricultural buildings and manufacturing plants in rural areas.
- Expand the Rural Social Scheme to provide additional income for farmers and fishermen by increasing the number of places available.
- Provide a well funded rural enterprise policy to focus on a broad spectrum of rural enterprise with a special emphasis on artisan and small food production.
- Review the regulatory regimes to better assist small and medium size businesses to conduct their own business.
- Initiate a study in consultation with Fáilte Ireland, LEADER companies, agricultural associations, County Enterprise Boards and rural tourism operators to devise a new plan for farm-based rural tourism, including the development of farm-based niche visitor attractions.
- Pursue the possibility of using former railway infrastructure as recreational trails for cycling etc. in partnership with Iarnród Éireann.

- Set up a National Monitoring Committee to oversee the consistent implementation of the Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines.
- Introduce an all-Ireland Walkways Development Plan, mapping out infrastructural needs and routes and maximising their use.
- Ensure that the giving by a farmer of permission on to his/her land for recreational purposes will not be used to jeopardise him/her receiving planning permission on his/ her own land.
- Implement a major programme to promote rural countryside recreation to be implemented by a dedicated unit / division of staff in consultation with stakeholders.

Transport

- We will build on the success thus far of the RTI and extend Rural Transport Programme nationwide.
- We will provide park and ride services in all appropriate locations.

Community Wardens

We will extend the successful pilot scheme of Community Wardens nationally. Working with community groups and schools, these wardens can act as guardians for the more accessible community facilities. They will help to ensure the upkeep of the local area and serve as a focus for voluntary activity within communities.

BALANCED REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Atlantic Gateways

We believe that a linked metropolitan corridor from Waterford through Cork, Limerick/Shannon to Galway – complimented by direct links between Waterford and Limerick - offers the best option of developing a national counterpoint to Dublin and the Dublin/Belfast economic corridor.

Strategic Transport Links

The Atlantic Gateways corridor will be complimented by new road and rail transport links joining the country's Gateway towns and cities as set out in Transport 21. We will re-open the Western Rail Corridor from Ennis to Claremorris and examine the feasibility of reopening the line from Claremorris to Sligo. The inter-urban motorway network will link Dublin to our biggest cities, the Atlantic Road Corridor will link Cork to Letterkenny/Derry and the new Border Corridor road will run from Sligo to Dundalk.

Gateways Innovation Fund

The new €300 million Gateways Innovation Fund will support innovative projects in urban regeneration, transport and other "Quality of Life" projects. The Fund will be a practical way of accelerating development of the gateways.

Inward Investment/Enterprise Support

We will actively prioritise inward investment proposals for the regions. The Gateways towns and cities will become Gateways of Expertise and Innovation to drive development throughout their regions. To this end, each agency involved in the enterprise sector will identify specific measures for prioritising action in the regions.

North West Gateway Initiative

We will work with the new Northern Executive to ensure that the economic and social benefits of peace are fully felt in Donegal, Derry and surrounding counties. Delivering the centrepiece Dublin – Derry/Letterkenny dual carriageway will be a core priority as we continue to develop the huge potential of the Northwest. We will work to increase cooperation in areas including spatial planning, education and skills, health and improvements in infrastructure. Investment in Derry Airport by Government will continue as recognition that it plays a vital role in Donegal and Ireland's future.

Reinvigorating Our Cities And Towns

The urban renewal incentives schemes, coupled with direct Government investment, have transformed the centres of Ireland's cities and towns. Over the next five years, we will continue to invest in urban renewal and will refocus our approach to encourage high visible impact and the attractiveness of our streetscapes.

We will particularly focus on remaining areas of development potential such as dockland areas. Over the next five years we will continue to support and encourage the development under-utilised dock and harbour areas such as Cork, Dublin, Galway and Sligo.

Cork Docklands

Government will fully support the important redevelopment of Cork Docklands.

Working with the new Cork Docklands National Steering Forum we are committed to the transformation of this area. When complete, it will supply 20,000 housing units, significant financial and retail employment, and a new cultural and leisure quarter to the people of Cork and the entire Munster area.

LOCAL & NATIONAL SPORTS FACILITIES

Improving Local Facilities and Expanding Participation

Over the next five years, we will continue to promote the development of a wide range of local sports facilities around the country, to improve participation and provide healthy social outlets for people of all ages.

We will:

- Roll out the Local Sports Partnership programme on a nationwide basis to promote the development of sport at community level.
- Complete, in conjunction with the Local Sports Partnerships, a national audit of local sports facilities.
- Put in place a long-term strategic plan to ensure the development of necessary local facilities throughout the country, followed by a year on year monitoring of improvements delivered.
- Prioritise Sports Capital Programme Grants towards those areas identified as most in need of funding/facilities.
- Fund Special Olympics clubs.
- Support a new Local Authority Swimming Pool Programme, prioritising need and disadvantage.
- Continue to support the Irish Sports Council as the statutory agency for the promotion, development and co-ordination of sport.
- Increase the development of public play and recreation areas for children.
- Promote a national advertising campaign highlighting the health benefits of sport and exercise.
- Change the application criteria of the Sports Capital Programme grants to require only 10% of own funding / contribution where applicants are located in a recognised area of urban disadvantage such as RAPID and a Local Drugs Task Force area.
- Ensure accessibility as a key component in the provision of sports and recreational facilities.

National Level

We will:

- Further develop the Sports Campus Ireland development at Abbotstown – incorporating the Irish Institute of Sport - and including the development of a new 25,000 seater stadium to accommodate athletics and field sports.
- Provide a National Stadium at Lansdowne Road so that our National Rugby and Soccer teams have a first-rate facility in which to play their games.
- Support elite athletes in preparation for the 2008 and 2012 Olympics and develop proposals for Ireland to be used as a base for other national teams in advance of the London Games.
- Continue with the implementation of our effective and modern anti-doping programmes, which have earned well-deserved recognition internationally.
- Produce a Green Paper on Animal Welfare in Sport and Recreation.
- Discuss the question of the sponsorship of sporting events by the alcohol industry with the aim of phasing it out.

Sports & Schools

While schools can only meet some of children's physical activity needs, we are determined to ensure that they can play their part through improved PE facilities and new programmes.

In government we will:

- Provide a dedicated fund of at least €100 million over five years from within the NDP allocation for school buildings.
- Work towards making PE mandatory at second level and put a revised PE curriculum for senior cycle students in place.
- Promote greater sharing of school and community sports facilities and make it a condition of the Sports Capital Programme that facilities be made available to schools where appropriate.
- Encourage more schools to apply for funding under the Sports Capital Programme by collaborating with their local sports clubs, and/or community groups.
- Initiate a financial support package aimed at introducing primary school children to swimming. Such a support package would be aimed primarily at the costs of transport to and from pools.

Women in Sport

Research shows that only 10% of women take part in sport and physical activity. Innovative programmes will be developed in conjunction with the Irish Sports Council to ensure that there is a greater involvement of women in sport and physical activity.

We will:

- Ensure that Local Sports Partnerships have an official dedicated to the promotion of girls and women's involvement in sport.
- Appoint a member of the Irish Sports Council to deal with all aspects of women in sport, including the gender proofing of all Sports' Council decisions.
- Establish a Forum on Female Participation in Sport in conjunction with the Irish Sports Council to make recommendations on all issues.
- Create an Annual Women's Sports Award Scheme.

Volunteerism

Volunteers are the lifeblood of our local sporting organisations. We are determined to encourage them and to better recognise their contribution.

In government, we will:

- Recognise the importance of volunteerism in the promotion of sport through the expansion of our Volunteer Awards scheme for persons in sport.

HOUSING

A range of actions is required to ensure that the housing provided is capable of meeting the diverse needs of our population

Overall Objectives

Our overall housing objectives for the next five years are to:

- Maintain a high level of housing construction, based on sound planning and a diversity of provision.
- Expand delivery of social and affordable housing options to meet the needs of 90,000 households. This expansion will assist in ensuring continued high housing output to take up any slack arising from the expected slight slowdown in overall housing completions.
- Plan strategically for the needs of a changed population to reflect a more dynamic population which moves more often, includes many new migrant and supports the elderly in their own home.
- Achieve a further significant fall in homelessness.
- Bring a new focus on quality in the provision of housing.
- Legislation will be brought forward on foot of the recommendations of the All-Party Committee on the Constitution on Property Rights.

Supporting Home Ownership While Protecting House Values and Jobs

We will implement a series of measures to help young people and families both to buy their first home and to meet their mortgage repayments.

Specifically we will:

- Legislate immediately to abolish stamp duty for all first-time buyers and make this change retrospective for all deeds presented for stamping to the Revenue Commissioners on or after 30th April 2007.
- Increase in Budget 2008 the ceiling on mortgage interest relief for first-time buyers and those who bought a house in the past seven years, from €8,000 to €10,000 for single people and from €16,000 to €20,000 for couples or widowed persons.
- As income taxes are reduced, we will keep the rate of mortgage interest relief at 20% for all home owners. From 1 Jan 2008, mortgage interest relief will be worth up to €167 per month for a single person and €333 per month for a couple or widowed person. A couple or widowed person with a joint mortgage of up to €400,000 over 33 years at an interest rate of 5% or a single person with a mortgage of up to €200,000 will be able to claim interest relief on the full amount of interest on their loan. The maximum relief available to a single person will be €2,000, while for a couple or a widowed person it will be €4,000.

Providing Affordable Housing

We will take two major initiatives to increase the provision of affordable houses to 5,000 houses per annum above existing commitments. We will:

- Extend the remit of the Affordable Homes Partnership. After only one year in existence the Affordable Homes Partnership, operating in the Greater Dublin Area, has been every successful in engineering land swaps for affordable housing, in identifying new lands for the provision of affordable housing, and in providing clear, good quality information to people interested in acquiring affordable housing.
- We will extend the remit of the Partnership nationwide to cover areas where affordability is a problem to accelerate the provision of affordable housing.
- Introduce new incentives for the provision of Affordable Housing.
- We will put in place an appropriate tax incentive scheme to operate in these areas in association with the Affordable Homes Partnership.

Social Housing

In Government we will:

- Ensure that all local authority housing is subject to the highest standards of design and that good community facilities are provided, especially for younger people.
- Bring a renewed focus on the regeneration of problem estates. Ballymun has shown how it can be done we will provide the resources to tackle substandard estates in other areas of the country.
- The new Sustainable Communities Fund will be resourced in supporting communities preparing for regeneration projects and in assisting them to tackle anti-social behaviour.
- Expand the paths to home ownership to assist the maximum number of people in gaining a stake in their own home.

Management Companies

In order to address the many real problems that have emerged with the operation of management companies, the Government will:

- Introduce legislation to govern the management of apartment complexes and other similar developments. This will set out the rights and duties of management companies and agents as well as tenants. The objective will be to ensure transparency and accountability for all concerned and the protection of home-owners investment in their property.
- Clearly set out the duties of local authorities in relation to the provision of services for all residential developments.

Travellers

The Government will continue to invest significant funds for the provision of good quality authorised sites and accommodation that meets the needs of travellers and the communities at large.

Homelessness

Our focus, in line with the Homeless Preventative Strategy, will be to assist with the long term and sustainable housing of vulnerable people who are in danger of becoming homeless.

With necessary care support we can move people from emergency accommodation to independent living.

Land Use

Government will ensure that sufficient active land management will facilitate the delivery of housing to meet the needs of different income and demographic groups.

Education & Community Facilities

We are determined to ensure that provision is made for proper education and community facilities where new communities are created. In government we will:

- Ensure that no rezoning of land for residential development can take place without a prior commitment of an appropriate proportion of land for schools, childcare, health centres and community centres.
- Ring-fence funding for the provision of schools and extensions at an early stage when new housing is being constructed.
- Ensure that all children have adequate space for play and access to a modern playground in their own community and that teenagers are also catered for by the provision of youth cafes, skateboard parks etc.

Quality Living Spaces

Creating sustainable towns and cities in a new wealthier Ireland means that we must up our game when it comes to urban design, the quality of our homes, parks and recreation facilities which we provide for our community.

Over the next five years we will:

- Introduce new urban design guidelines for building new housing developments so that future generations can look back with pride with the environment which we are building today,
- Require all new apartments and other high density developments to comply with minimum design standards dealing with space, light, noise protection, recycling facilities, recreational facilities and so on.
- Ensure that existing public parks and recreational areas are protected and enhanced and develop a network of 'people's parks' and 'urban woods' to enhance the experience of living in our towns and cities.
- Include in Local Area Plans (LAPs), adequate provision for green areas, playspaces and community space.

Environmentally Efficient Housing

We will work to develop a new model of environmentally efficient housing which will:

- Introduce a national attic and wall insulation grant scheme to the value of €100.
- Reduce energy consumption,
- Maximise water efficiency and the reuse of rainwater for non-drinking purposes, and
- Ensure that noise insulation levels protect the quality of life of home owners.

JUSTICE

Prisons

- Invest significantly in rehabilitation for prisoners. We will set annual rehabilitation goals and targets. By 2012 fully resourced and staffed rehabilitation programmes will be available to the entirety of the prison population.
- Ensure that a prisoner's rehabilitation needs are assessed on entering prison and that an appropriate programme is offered based on risk assessment and rehabilitation needs. Such programmes will consist of work, counselling, health services and education modules as well as offence-based programs.
- Ensure that prisoner remission will only be earned by participation in rehabilitation programmes. Refusal to participate will result in loss of remission.
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- Remission higher than 10% will only be available where rehabilitation programmes are successfully completed and the offence did not involve violence.
- Put in place similar conditions for those on remission as exist for those on bail regarding where they reside, who they associate with etc.
- Extend measures to make prisons drug-free. These will include a prohibition of physical contact with prisoners, drug tests on arrival (and regularly thereafter) with appropriate penalties, and severe penalties for those who act as conduits for drugs.
- Continue to invest in the modernisation of our prisons and ensure that our prisons meet current international standards.
- Ensure that major prisons contain high security wings/sections to house those convicted of particularly violent crimes or those who pose a danger to other prisoners or prison staff.

- Introduce a Prison Discipline Strategy to ensure that Ireland has facilities and procedures for enforcing prison discipline which meet the highest international standards and to monitor and review the operation of the new prison rules.
- Ensure effective and independent monitoring and inspections of places of detention and ratify the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention against Torture to guarantee this obligation.
- Fully support the new Inspector of Prisons who has been established on a statutory basis and who will have serious complaints referred to him by the Minister for Justice.

Community Payback

- Build on the community service order regime by introducing a ‘Community Payback’ Scheme that will require offenders who are not subject to automatic long prison terms to provide real services for the communities they have damaged. These would include cleaning streets, painting over graffiti, repairing public facilities, etc.
- Give victims and communities a greater say in what work offenders do as part of their community service, including, where appropriate, direct reparation in cash or kind.

Parental Responsibility

- Provide for a system of parental responsibility for criminal damage and costs incurred by victims of their children’s anti-social behaviour in addition to recently enacted provision for parental supervision and compensation orders.
- Foster a ‘Parents Plus’ approach to support families and parents and will establish local programmes to help parents, including parenting classes for those whose children have been identified as most at risk of future anti-social behaviour.

Anti-Social Behaviour

- Create ASBATs (Anti-Social Behaviour Action Teams) in each local authority area.
- Increase penalties under the Public Order Act especially for alcohol-related disorder and increase the fine for supplying alcohol to under 18s from €1,500 to €5,000.
- Expand Garda powers to issue “stay away orders” where there is harassment in public places / at a person’s home or witness intimidation.
- We will legislate to allow Gardaí to issue “restriction orders”, which would be used in emergency situations to restrict named persons from traveling to, or from certain places, for defined periods of time.
- Increase the CCTV grant aid system for community groups and organisations as part of a nationwide CCTV rollout in all major county towns.
- Establish special Garda units to deal with anti-social behavior on public transport.
- Legislate for mandatory jail terms for violent unprovoked assaults and specifically criminalise the practice of so-called “happy slapping”, i.e. the making and publication of videos of violent assaults.
- Expand the role of community wardens.
- Recognise the need to work within communities where anti-social behaviour is more prevalent by improving and supporting community-based approaches, including family-focused solutions and community policing.

Gardaí

- Further increase Garda numbers to 15,000 by 2010 and 16,000 by 2012.
- Rapidly improve the ratio of civilian staff to Garda officers across all areas of the organisation, including specialist areas, thereby releasing further Gardaí to visible, frontline policing duties in the community.
- Provide for an increased number of promotion posts to ensure that management is not over-stretched by this expansion.
- Use the extra capacity to target communities experiencing significant anti-social behaviour and crime which impacts on people in their daily lives.
- Introduce a Garda Charter setting out targeted Garda response times and levels of service which the public can expect including frequency of high visibility patrols in urban and rural communities.
- Recognising the need for policing in areas of growing population, we will conduct regular detailed analyses of Garda-to-population ratios to ensure every region in the country has appropriate policing.
- Ensure that special operations such as Operation Anvil continue and are based on Garda management study of crime patterns.
- Support the Garda Reserve and ensure that its strength reaches and is maintained at 10% of the Garda strength.
- Task the Garda Inspectorate with assessing the need to establish a dedicated Missing Persons Unit, including a response network similar to ‘Amber Alert’ in the USA.
- Introduce conditions governing the use by a suspect of the Garda interview video. Contravening these will be a criminal offence.
- Monitor the new code of discipline and whistleblowers regulations, implemented following the Morris Tribunal findings.
- Place a renewed emphasis within the Gardaí on the importance for the force to play an active role in tackling the scourge of racism and homophobia and upholding the human rights standards within our society.
- Complete the implementation of the Barr tribunal recommendations and also implement the recommendations contained in the Garda Inspectorate report relating to barricade incidents.

Drugs

The Government will:

- Open two cocaine specific treatment centres, in addition to pilot projects for cocaine approved under Emerging Needs Fund.
- Implement the recommendations of the working group on Drug Rehabilitation including extra detox beds and community employment specific places in locations around the country.
- Develop and strengthen the range of projects being undertaken through the Local and Regional Drugs Task Forces. We will continue to work with the task forces on identifying local needs to counteract the problems of drug misuse.
- Continue to use the Young People's Facilities and Services Fund to assist in the development of youth facilities (including sport and recreational facilities) and services in disadvantaged areas where a significant drug problem exists or has the potential to develop. The Fund will be extended to further towns mainly in Leinster.
- Expand the successful Drug Court programme and provide Judges with the option of sentencing certain offenders to mandatory drug treatment programmes in addition to prison.
- Increase Garda search powers in relation to drug crime along the lines of the new random breath-testing model for drink driving to allow random searches at particular places, times and events where senior Gardaí believe there is a risk of drugs being present.
- Support targeted Garda anti-drug use programmes in schools and third-level institutions.
- Expand the Criminal Assets Bureau operational presence in each Garda Division with the introduction of additional criminal assets profilers and CAB liaison officers in each Garda Division with appropriate training and links into the urban CAB success.
- Require all mobile phones to be registered with name, address and proof of identity in order to stop drug-pushers using untraceable, unregistered phones.

Organised / Gangland Crime

- Continue to support and fully fund specialized Units such as the Criminal Assets Bureau and the National Criminal Investigations Bureau so that the scourge of organized crime can be combated.
- Introducing divestitures, which require defendants to divest themselves of interests in tainted enterprises, impose restrictions on the future activities and investments of an individual, and order the dissolution or reorganisation of any enterprise.
- Introducing trusteeships will allow the Courts to empower trustees to run organizations where they are infiltrated or controlled by criminal elements.
- Fully implement into Irish law the EU and Council of Europe human rights instruments against trafficking in human beings, and provide supports for the victims of such trafficking.

Sentencing

- Establish a Judicial Sentencing Commission under the auspices of the Courts Service. This Commission will be comprised only of serving judges from each of the State's courts and its powers will include the power to establish sentencing guidelines. These guidelines will improve the consistency of judicial sentencing without impairing the independence of trial judges in specific cases. Trial judges will be required to follow the Commission's guidelines or to explain why the guidelines are not being followed in any particular case.
- Introduce a formal review process, on an annual basis, to assess the effect of the stringent new mandatory sentence regime for drug crime introduced in the Criminal Justice Act 2007. This process will be carried out by representatives of the Government, the DPP, and the Gardaí in consultation with the Courts Service (as appropriate) and will determine whether further amendments to the operation of the system are required.
- Introduce a formal annual review to assess the effect of the stringent new bail regime introduced in the Criminal Justice Act 2007. This process will be carried out along the lines of the mandatory sentence for drug crime review above will determine if further amendments to the operation of the bail system are required.
- Provide for the DPP to appeal against lenient sentences in the District Court and allow the DPP to make submissions at sentencing stage.
- Enhance the role of the Judicial Studies Institute in assisting the professional development of the judiciary.

Court Procedures

- Introduce means to ensure that criminal trials can no longer be collapsed because of legal technicalities. This will include legislation and, if necessary, appropriate amendment to the Constitution.
- Introduce new pre-trial procedures to deal with admissibility of evidence to save overtime, and the time of jurors and the court.
- Permit the Court greater discretion in respect of how trials are to be conducted and give enable it to give directions as to document exchange and scheduling of witnesses.
- Put in place a structure whereby the defence will accept certain kinds of technical evidence by certificate of Gardaí unless they can show good reason why Gardaí should have to be physically present in court and will put in place a

structure whereby technical evidence, particularly search warrants, are presumed to be valid unless contradictory evidence can be produced.

- Introduce procedures so that the defence should provide the prosecution with a list of intended witnesses and put structures in place to ensure that the prosecution is on notice of the points of defence raised by the defence in advance.
- Provide, in non-criminal matters, lawyers' clients with a right of application to the Court where they contend that their legal bill is excessive and includes wasted costs.

Witness & Victim Support and Legal Aid

In government we will:

- Establish a statutory Victims Support Agency and set up a Victim's Council to formulate victim policy.
- Protect the identities of witnesses and victims at identification parades through the installation of one-way glass in Garda stations.
- Re-instate the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board so that the victims of violent and sexual crime receive compensation for their injuries.
- Introduce a right for the State to recover from the perpetrators of crime the amount paid out by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board in respect of that crime. The procedure for this recovery will be streamlined, including by way of permitting the sentencing judge to make an order directly against the perpetrator, rather than the State necessarily being required to launch a separate civil suit.
- Ensure that an accused who can afford to defend themselves does not obtain legal aid by requiring those seeking legal aid to complete a statutory declaration prior to attending court. Supplying inaccurate or untruthful information will be an offence punishable with a fine and/or imprisonment.

Domestic Violence and Crimes Against Children

In government we will:

- Hold a referendum on the rights of children in line with the Referendum Bill published this year. This will include a provision allowing the Oireachtas to legislate for the exchange and collection of information in relation to suspected child abuse. If the referendum proposal is approved by the people, the Government will introduce legislation which will underpin our vetting system and allow the Garda Central Vetting Unit to disclose, subject to appropriate controls, to potential employers, information about the serious risk of child abuse.
- Establish a Domestic Violence Prevention Office which will provide a unified service for victims of domestic abuse. This will incorporate legal advice, counselling, court accompaniment, protection and welfare services.
- Set up a Domestic Violence Fund under which we will increase the number of refuge spaces.
- Provide that each Garda region will have a team extensively trained in the area of domestic violence.
- Expand the mechanism by which sexual offenders are monitored after their release from prison, including by the expansion of resources to the probation service and the Garda Vetting Unit.
- Persons who are the subject of Sex Offenders Orders will be actively monitored and where State agencies are concerned about the behaviour of a particular offender, the Gardaí will have the power to apply to Court for orders restraining released offenders from visiting certain places or approaching certain people.
- Gardaí will also have the power to require individual sex offenders to provide specific information about their movements and activities, over and above that generally required from all offenders.

Rape, Sexual Assault and Sexual Exploitation:

The Government will:

- Provide an entitlement to free full separate legal advice, assistance and representation to complainants in cases of sexual violence.
- Mandate the HSE to ensure sexual assault treatment centres are established in all regions, with on-call staffing.
- Create a new offence of supplying and administering 'date rape' drugs.
- Bring in tougher penalties for trafficking, ensure greater prosecution of traffickers and improve support services for their victims, particularly for those who are the victims of sexual exploitation.
- Provide for the forfeiture of all material gains from the production, sale and distribution of illegal pornography.
- Ensure that all sexual offenders are assessed before their release from prison to identify the level of supervision and regulation needed.
- Introduce a Sexual Offences Bill which will consolidate and modernise all criminal law in the area of sexual offences in a manner which is clear, unambiguous and uncompromising in its objectives of protecting victims - particularly children - from sexual crime, and punishing the perpetrators of such crime.
- Ratify the UN Convention for the Suppression of the Trafficking in Persons of the Exploitation and of the Prostitution of others.

ISLANDS

Our vision is of strong island communities, which can sustain their unique heritage and way of life in tandem with meeting the needs of modern living.

Infrastructure

We will complete the infrastructure programme on the islands, ensuring low-cost high quality access services with fixed and competitive tariffs for passengers and freight.

Enterprise & Community Development

In government we will:

- Develop the potential of language based and countryside recreation based tourism and services through the new rural development programme and through Údarás na Gaeltachta.
- Provide broadband on all islands.
- Change the law to enable Údarás na Gaeltachta to provide development services on a contract basis to non-Gaeltacht islands thus ensuring parity between all islands.
- Introduce a specific scheme for offshore islands to incentivise and support the production of island-produced and consumed renewable energy by island co-ops or other island based organisations for community buildings and public lighting.
- Ensure that Islands through Comhdháil Oileán na hÉireann will have their own dedicated LEADER Partnership Company.
- Invest through the Community Employment Scheme, the Job Initiative Scheme, the Rural Social Scheme and the Community Services Programme in providing top class community services on islands.
- Ensure that play facilities are provided on islands where necessary.

Developing Health and Educational Facilities and Services

The Government will:

- Improve health facilities on the offshore islands to ensure that they are fully equipped to deal with routine and where necessary emergency medical situations. This will include the provision of proper facilities for visiting nurses, dentists and other health care practitioners.
- Provide tele-medicine facilities to allow our most remote island communities and medical practitioners access to doctors and consultants in our specialist hospitals.
- Provide better ante and post-natal services on islands.
- Maintain all existing second level schools where at all possible and carry out an assessment to ensure the most suitable educational services for islands without a secondary school.

PEACE AND UNITY

The spectacular progress of recent years cannot be taken for granted. We must continue to work for lasting reconciliation and the full delivery of the potential offered by the peace process. This new Government is committed to further steps forward for peace and unity in our country.

North/South Co-Operation

We are determined to ensure that the full potential of North South cooperation is realised. We see economic co-operation in this field as central to the future economic well being of the island – the all-island economy is central to all government economic plans. This Government will:

- Implement the groundbreaking Comprehensive Study on the All-Island Economy.
- Have a fully operational all-island energy market, to include an all-island approach to the renewable energy sector, a second electricity inter-connector and an all-island gas network.
- Introduce a Single Electricity Market by November 2007.
- Actively support fully integrated and seamless co-operation in the areas of health, education, infrastructural development, communications, planning and other public services.
- Press for a single all-island corporation tax of 12.5%.
- Continue to progress the North West Gateway Initiative.

Border Communities

Partition and the Troubles caused huge damage to our border communities. Apart from the social consequences, towns were cut off from natural hinterlands and economic corridors were cut off altogether. We are committed to implementing an unprecedented programme of investment in border communities.

This Government will:

- Press for all-island planning and co-ordination in infrastructural investment across the Island over the next decade, to ensure greater provision of services to border communities.
- Establish a cross-border Innovation Fund to support education, skills, science and innovation, energy research, regional development, tourism development, poverty, social inclusion and community infrastructure.
- Support the development of cross-border projects including:
The Dublin – Letterkenny/Derry dual carriageway

The Border Corridor
The Ulster Canal
The Bridge at Narrow-Water.

- Campaign for the complete removal of North-South cross-border telecoms and bank charges.
- Further develop the Dublin-Belfast rail line as part of an integrated rail service serving major population centres, North and South.
- Seek to maximise the potential for cross-border cancer services, building on the project to provide services to Donegal.
- Support the significant upgrading of higher education capacity in the border region through strategic alliances between education institutions, North and South.
- Intensify our efforts to promote graduate mobility, graduate retention and access to people from disadvantaged areas to higher education.
- Complete the rebuilding of all border crossings destroyed during the Troubles.
- Complete the development of Derry Airport, for which we have already committed almost €1 million.

Sectarianism

We believe that it is time to put a greater emphasis on tackling sectarianism. The hard reality is that, as politics has progressed in the North, sectarianism has festered and in many cases grown. It represents by far the largest threat to lasting peace and needs urgent attention. The Government will:

- Establish a new Anti-Sectarianism Fund to assist projects in interface areas designed specifically to address the root cause of sectarianism and to diffuse tensions.
- Increase the Reconciliation Fund to €5 million to improve dialogue between the nationalist and unionist traditions and develop capacity building amongst communities affected by the Troubles, including a focus on isolated border communities.
- Provide additional staff and resources to the British Irish Secretariat to improve monitoring of sectarian incidents throughout the North and improve liaison with the PSNI.
- Through regular and structured contact with the appropriate authorities and stakeholders including the devolved Government, community groups, political parties and civil society, monitor progress and press for full and timely implementation of the Triennial Programme of the Shared Future.
- Review all funding for education and community projects to see where a greater impact can be had on tackling sectarianism.

Policing

The establishment of a professional and impartial police force for the North has always been a cornerstone of Government policy. We believe the PSNI, with fully implemented Patten proposals, is that force. We also believe that all nationalist parties have a responsibility to be constructively involved as members of the Policing boards to ensure the PSNI delivers and is accountable to the nationalist community. Recent progress on this is extremely welcome.

This Government will:

- Monitor the full implementation of the Patten Reforms.
- Press for increased Garda – PSNI co-operation including common police training where appropriate.
- Provide continued support for the work of the Police Ombudsman.

Demilitarisation

In the 2003 Joint Declaration the Irish Government secured a programme of demilitarisation and agreement to independent monitoring of that Programme through the IMC. As a result, today British troop numbers stand at their lowest level since the start of the Troubles and all watchtowers have been removed.

The Government will

- Press for the complete implementation of the British Army demilitarisation Programme.
- Negotiate for further reductions in troop numbers, beyond the Programme targets.
- Fund an international competition for a permanent landmark peace monument to be located in the border region.
- Press for the full decommissioning of loyalist and dissident republican weapons.

IRELAND IN THE WORLD

We want to ensure that Ireland is a constructive member of the international community, prioritising the active promotion of peace and development through the European Union, the United Nations, international agencies and direct action.

We intend adopting an active foreign policy in the next five years, based on a series of steps forward in key areas.

Making Neutrality Count

Neutrality is central to our vision of Ireland as the bridge between the developed and developing world, the intermediary and facilitator in peace processes, the first on the ground in a major humanitarian crisis – the model UN State for the 21st century. Our policy for the next five years is to Make Neutrality Count.

We believe neutrality enhances our standing internationally. Our goal is to use that standing to build peace and deliver development.

United Nations – Ireland The Model UN Member State.

Our goal is to establish Ireland as the model UN State, a world leader in development assistance, humanitarian rapid response and conflict resolution.

We will:

- Continue Ireland's strong support for the primacy of the UN in international affairs and of UN reform, and also the international commitment of greater resources to peacekeeping and tackling the root causes of terrorism, and the creation of rapidly deployable emergency response units for humanitarian disasters.
- Inform the United Nations of Ireland's desire to stay at the forefront of UN reform efforts, placing our full diplomatic resources at the use of the UN.
- Place Ireland at the heart of UN efforts to respond rapidly to humanitarian and human right crises in the developing world. Ireland will become the template for other States through the expansion of the Rapid Response Initiative.
- Increase the size and capacity of the Rapid Response Corps, the civilian corps of volunteers trained and equipped by the Irish Government to be on the ground in an area of humanitarian crisis within a short period.
- Double the amount of emergency relief supplies held in, and distributed from, our new pre-positioned humanitarian relief centres at the Curragh, Kildare and Brindisi, Italy.
- Increase funding to the regional supply depot for Africa, based in Accra, Ghana.
- Increase funding by at least €40 million to the Irish Government Emergency Response Fund and increase funding to the UN Central Emergency Response Fund.
- Work to strengthen the capacity of Irish and international NGOs to respond more quickly to international emergencies.

Development Aid

Over the next five years this Government will further develop Ireland's Development Aid Programme, which is already amongst the best in the world. We will:

- Increase ODA to 0.7% of GNP by 2012. The annual Budget statement will contain an outline of the target for the coming year and a report on progress to date.
- Call on all political parties to commit to support the target.
- Increase the number of Programme Countries to a minimum of ten by 2012.
- Spend at least €100 million per annum combating HIV/AIDS and other communicable diseases in the developing world.
- Develop programmes to assist both individuals and institutions to participate in the Aid Programme. This will include the provision of assistance to public and private sector institutions to form development partnerships with similar institutions in the developing world.
- Following the establishment of an Irish Aid Information & Volunteering Centre in Dublin, we will establish these centres in Cork and Galway.
- Develop Regional Aid Programmes in Southern and Western Africa to address trans-national threats such as disease and food insecurity.
- Ensure funding mechanisms for NGOs are accessible and simplified.
- Seek to improve the quality and effectiveness of EU aid.
- Act on the findings of the Hunger Task Force.
- Support the fight against corruption in developing countries by supporting institutions, NGOs and civil society that promote good governance and strive to ensure that our development assistance continues to reach the poor. We will also support the African Peer Review Mechanism.
- Provide financial support for events to mark Africa Day, 25 May.
- Ensure that the sourcing of Fair Trade goods where possible is part of all Government Departments' purchasing policy.
- Adopt an integrated approach to development across all government departments.

Conflict Resolution

In order to further promote Ireland as a centre for conflict resolution, we will:

- Establish an Academic Centre for Conflict Resolution, to provide academic and analytical expertise in this area. The Centre will be an academic resource for the Government Conflict Resolution Unit and will draw on cross-border expertise. It will focus on the developing world and liaise with existing conflict resolution and reconciliation groups.
- Establish an annual €25 million Stability Fund, overseen by the Conflict Resolution Unit, to fund specific efforts on the area of conflict resolution and post conflict issues in the developing world.
- Establish a system of roving ambassadors to crisis regions.
- Fund a number of fourth level scholarships in the conflict resolution area.

Cluster Bombs

This Government will campaign for a complete ban on the use of cluster munitions. In the absence of a full ban we will seek agreement on an immediate freeze on the use of cluster munitions pending the establishment of effective international instruments to address humanitarian concerns regarding their use.

Burma

Ireland will not establish diplomatic relations with Burma until Aung San Suu Kyi is released.

Darfur

We will use all avenues, bilaterally, through the EU and through the UN, to focus urgent international attention on the crisis in Darfur and to seek agreement for a lasting, peaceful solution to the crisis.

Middle East

With the EU and the broader international community, this government, will press for dialogue, reconciliation and negotiations leading to a two-State solution.

Extraordinary Rendition

The Irish Government is completely opposed to the practice of extraordinary rendition.

1. The Government will prioritise effective enforcement of a) Criminal Justice (United Nations Convention Against Torture) Act, 2000 b) The Geneva Conventions Acts 1962-1998

To that end the Government will encourage and support An Garda Síochána in the investigation and enforcement of these Statutes. It will do so by making resources available for specialized training in the provisions of those Statutes to members of An Garda Síochána and by other means as may be required by An Garda Síochána in order to ensure effective protection for the dignity of all persons within or passing through the State.

We will ensure that all relevant legal instruments are used so that the practice of extraordinary rendition does not occur in this State in any form.

2. Ireland will seek EU and international support to address deficiencies in aspects of the regulation of civil aviation under the Chicago Convention.

Disarmament and the Arms Trade

We will :

- Continue to press for nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation.
- Support a binding and comprehensive global treaty on the trade of arms, covering all weapons and ammunition, and a binding, strengthened EU code of conduct for arms exports.
- Strengthen controls on military exports and to regulate arms-brokering activities in Ireland through the enactment of the Control of Exports Bill.

Irish Abroad

For every £1 spent on the Irish Abroad in 1997, we spend €19 today. In the coming five years we will:

- Increase funding for emigrant welfare to €34 million per annum.
- Maintain the momentum in the campaign for the undocumented Irish. We will use every opportunity to lobby on behalf of the undocumented Irish.
- Resist all attempts to downgrade the Irish Abroad Unit to unanswerable Agency Status and resist all efforts to divert funds presently allocated to emigrant welfare to the administration of such an Agency.
- Complete the process whereby RTÉ can broadcast into the UK.
- Work to deliver free public transport for emigrant pensioners when they visit Ireland.

IRELAND IN EUROPE

The EU was a key catalyst in Ireland's economic and social transformation. It has helped us to realise the full potential of national sovereignty through the unique arrangement of a community of nations with strong collective action.

We believe passionately in a constructive agenda to use our membership of the European Union to make our country and the wider Union stronger. The EU has been the greatest force for peace and prosperity in the history of Europe and we believe that it must continue to evolve to meet modern challenges and deliver practical improvements in the lives of Europeans.

This Government will:

- Vigorously oppose all moves towards harmonisation of taxation, especially corporation tax.
- Building on the Ireland's Rapid Response Corps, we will promote a European Civil Peace Corps to assist in humanitarian disasters.
- Ensure that Ireland does not become involved in an EU common defence.
- Support moves to increase competitiveness within the Union through developing research and knowledge capacities, as well as promoting competition.
- Propose further measures to improve the quality of communications between the Union and its citizens.
- Support efforts to implement a cross-Union approach to energy security and climate change.
- Maintain a vigorous stance in defence of Irish maritime communities in all EU Fisheries discussions.
- Insist that existing agreements on the CAP be honoured, within the Union and in trade negotiations.
- Issue an annual call for proposals to assist local events commemorating Europe Day.
- Aim to have Ireland consistently within the top group on the EU internal Market Scoreboard which monitors transposition of EU Directives.
- Support EU moves to ensure airlines have transparent fares, including all taxes and fees, that they end the practice of charging different prices in different states for the same flight and introduce safer flying regulations.

- Press for increased EU supports and more ambitious targets for renewable energy.
- Ensure EU funding to underpin the Peace Process continues.
- Support moves to minimise EU bureaucracy.
- Support moves toward a single European Mortgage Market.
- Continue the work of the National Forum on Europe.
- Work towards an EU wide ban on television advertising aimed at children.

DEFENCE

We will :

- Prepare a second White Paper on Defence for the period 2011- 2020. The Second White Paper will consider expanding the roles of the Air Corps and the Naval service. This will include increasing the size of the navy flotilla and developing an Air Corps' airlift capability.
- This Government is firmly committed to maintaining Irish neutrality and will remain steadfastly opposed to any changes to the triple lock as enshrined in our law. In accordance with this, we will ensure that participation by the Defence Forces in any overseas peace support missions continue to be based on the triple-lock mechanism of UN mandate, Government and Dáil approval.
- Ensure that investment in the Defence Forces continues to grow, with the full commercial value of all defence property disposals to be received by the Department of Defence for investment in capital projects and new equipment.
- Continue the ongoing policy of annual recruitment and maintain the present establishment. This will enable the Permanent Defence Forces to maintain a strength of 10,500 fully trained personnel with an additional provision from 2008 onwards for up to 350 troops to be in training at any given time.
- Fast-track the civilianisation of all outstanding agreed posts.
- Ensure that our troops have the most modern and effective range of protective equipment, weaponry and training available.
- Fully execute the Reserve Defence Forces (RDF) implementation plan by the 2009 target, including improving RDF interoperability with the PDF, and the introduction of procedures to allow suitably qualified RDF personnel serve on overseas duties.
- Continue the ongoing policy of recruitment to the RDF through regular and targeted recruitment campaigns.
- Develop the role and contribution of the Medical Corps and expand its capacity to deliver a range of medical facilities on UN mandated missions.
- Develop the Commissioning From the Ranks programme, both for enlisted personnel under 28 by way of the cadet programme, and by way of regular CFR competitions for NCOs.
- Conduct regular reviews of the operation of the equality and anti-bullying measures in the military.
- Ensure the Defence Forces are intrinsically involved in all future 1916 commemorations.
- Provide annual subventions to support and encourage the excellent work of the officially recognised veterans groups ONET and IUNVA.
- Continue to support the excellent work of Civil Defence through the ongoing provision of new equipment and encourage increased membership of Civil Defence through regular and targeted recruitment programmes.
- Ensure that the Office of Emergency Planning coordinates the publication of an annual review of the emergency plans of each functional department, outlining achievements and improvements across all sectors.
- Continue the annual programme of major simulated exercises and use these structured exercises to support sustained public awareness and reassurance.
- Promote greater cooperation and knowledge sharing between the Coast Guard, the Navy and Air Corps to ensure that the water surrounding this island are safe for seafarers and coastal communities.

IRISH LANGUAGE AND THE GAELTACHT

Our overall strategy will involve:

- Continuing to develop a 20 year Strategic Plan for the growth in the use of Irish and in bilingualism by 2008. Building on last December's 13 point Government Statement on the Irish language, this will be a comprehensive blueprint for the expansion of the use of Irish in every urban and rural area in Ireland.
- Support the introduction of a Languages Act in Northern Ireland as provided for in the St. Andrew's agreement.
- Seek to achieve all-party consensus on the issue of reinstating the Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Irish Language.
- Continue to provide funding to the Higher Education Authority to ensure that the training necessary in Irish language translation is provided.
- Increasing support for the public service to develop the capacity to provide comprehensive services through the medium of the Irish language.
- Working to extend the number of professionals who are available to serve the Irish language speaking and Gaeltacht communities.
- Ensuring that the Irish language and Gaeltacht Affairs are maintained as a major part of the portfolio of a full member of Cabinet.

Growing the Use of Irish in Our Schools & Colleges

Recognising the huge role which the education system has played, and will play, in the future growth of the language, we will place a particular emphasis on Irish in education. Harnessing the huge potential of the Gaelscoil movement and improving the quality of Irish in English-medium schools will be a priority for the Government in the next five years. We will:

- Protect the current position of our national language in all parts of the school curriculum and strenuously oppose any proposal to abolish its position in the Senior Cycle.
- Implement further changes in the Irish curriculum, with a focus on improving young people's command of the spoken language and move towards more marks for Oral Irish in the Leaving Cert exams as announced.
- Build on the provision of in-service for primary teachers in teaching drama through Irish in the 2006/07 school year, by encouraging English medium primary schools to teach more subjects through Irish.
- Put in place new arrangements to enable Gaelscoileanna to hire teachers with a strong ability to teach all subjects through Irish.
- Establish a senior officials group between the Departments of Education and Science and Community, Rural And Gaeltacht Affairs to enhance the actions of both Departments and their Agencies in addressing challenges in supporting the Irish language including strengthening the teaching of Irish throughout the Education system.
- Build on the work done by the Dublin Institute of Advanced Studies and the universities in the development of research and teaching of Celtic Studies. We will make Ireland the world centre of excellence for such studies with particular emphasis on research in and the teaching of Old, Classical and Middle Irish.

Building Vibrant Gaeltacht Communities

It is important that the benefits of economic development do not undermine the role of the Irish language in the Gaeltacht. We will:

- Build on recent planning laws by setting up a National Monitoring Committee to oversee the clear and consistent implementation of the protections for the unique linguistic identity of the Gaeltacht in a way which supports the continued development of the Gaeltacht without undermining its language and culture.
- Examine Section 10 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 that requires local authorities to prioritise the promotion and development of Irish when considering future development schemes within the Gaeltacht; to see if it is effective in achieving its objective and if not to strengthen it.
- Develop a comprehensive plan based on the Linguistic Study of the Gaeltacht with clear and effective measures for the continued preservation and development of the language in the Gaeltacht.
- Provide for an extension to the Irish language network of crèches in the Gaeltacht. Along with this we will ensure that support is given to crèches which want to set up facilities through Irish nationwide.
- Provide extra funding to market language tourism to the Gaeltacht for foreign visitors.

THE ARTS

This Government is committed to implementing a range of steps for the Arts which will see participation broaden and deepen in the next five years.

Arts and Education

We will:

- Support training and professional development for the performing arts by creating, enhancing and extending modules of in-service training.
- Support measures that are child centred in arts and cultural programmes and develop and enhance child centred policies that impact throughout the country.
- Increase funding to the Arts Council for education initiatives.
- Promote an appreciation of and engagement in arts and culture from early education through to all education levels through the implementation of a national comprehensive strategy.

Arts and Participation

We will:

- Encourage and support the strategic development of the arts in local communities, both geographic and communities of interest, for the disadvantaged and for minority groups.
- Encourage, promote and foster volunteerism in the arts, drawing on our successful development of volunteerism in sports.
- Ensure that arts venues are adequately funded to facilitate activities and to maximise community use and accessibility for all.

Arts and Investment

We will:

- Encourage partnerships between local authorities, central government, relevant local community groups and the Arts Council with a view to funding arts locally.

- Develop a new policy to create and sustain employment in the arts, particularly arts employment that can market, operate and develop our local arts infrastructure.
- Provide new tax and other incentives aimed at making cultural and educational philanthropy more attractive and to help those working in the arts to make a decent living. In recognition that higher economic growth can benefit the arts, we will encourage the full participation of the private and corporate sector in supporting the development of our arts infrastructure, and arts programmes and services.
- Continue to support the development of the traditional arts.
- Create a new combined Cultural Visa and Work Permit that simplifies and speeds up entry by incoming artists and groups to Ireland.
- Ensure that dynamic incentives remain available to the film and television sector and develop bi-lateral agreements to maximise the potential of Section 481.
- Continue the examination of fiscal incentives to encourage investment in our indigenous film industry.

The Agencies

We will:

- Provide multi-annual funding to the Arts Council that identifies key areas for development, either for organisations, or key strategies in the Arts.
- Ensure that the increased level of Arts activity is sustained and developed.

National Cultural Institutions

We will ensure that our cultural institutions are developed to their highest potential by capital investment in storage, presentation, and digitisation of our national treasures.

To ensure this we will:

- Digitise the collections of the National Library, the National Gallery, the National Museum and the National Archives.
- Establish a Museum of Irish Literature in Parnell Square.
- Place the National Theatre, the Irish Museum of Modern Art and the National Concert Hall on a statutory footing.
- Complete the construction of a new National Theatre and a new National Concert Hall.
- Begin a programme to digitise all State papers.
- Complete Phases II and III of the National Museum and Collins Barracks and complete Phases II and III of the National Gallery.
- Establish a National Sports Museum.
- Roll out ACCESS II.

Commemoration

We believe that each tradition on this island is entitled to commemorate its past with dignity and respect for others. In recent years we have worked to allow the public of this state to honour those who sacrificed so much for the achievement of independence. The state commemoration at Easter 2006 amply justified this policy.

In light of the seminal importance of 1916, we will:

- Push forward with plans for a substantial commemoration in the lead up to 2016.
- Establish the GPO as a museum of celebration of Irish progress and achievement across a broad spectrum as a landmark 1916 centenary project.
- Support the creation of programmes of events in all cities and towns in Ireland.
- Make available to historians and to the public, records of the Military Pensions Archive in the Department of Defence.
- Advance the redevelopment of Glasnevin Cemetery as part of the preparations for 100th anniversary of the Easter Rising.
- Restore 16 Moore Street and establish therein an interpretative centre, linked to the refurbished GPO, to honour those who fought in the 1916 Rising.
- Ensure a prominent cultural component to the 1916 Centenary commemoration.
- Provide a fund to which community groups can apply for support for the refurbishment of existing monuments commemorating events in the 1913-23 period.
- Advance plans to commemorate the Irish soldiers who fell at the Somme in 1916.

CIVIC LIFE

Ireland has a deep tradition of active engagement by its citizens in every aspect of our national life and culture. It was the commitment of the Irish people that so often, formally and informally, provided social services and community leadership as well as a sporting and cultural life for our people.

In today's more prosperous Ireland, we need to identify and understand how public policy helps and hinders active engagement. We need to identify practical steps to encourage more of our people to become involved, and to stay involved, in the life of their own community.

Active Citizenship and Volunteering

To ensure this active involvement continues this Government will implement the recommendations of the Taskforce on Active Citizenship.

These recommendations include:

- Introducing of a National Active Citizenship theme culminating in a National Active Citizenship week.
- Introducing of National Presidential Citizen Awards to recognise outstanding contributions made by individuals to Irish society.
- Ensuring that Local Authorities prioritise the provision of community and recreational facilities as part of their Development Plans.
- Undertaking an audit of existing community facilities to identify gaps and identify opportunities for improved use of existing facilities.
- Identifying how better use can be made of schools at evening and weekend time to act as community hubs.
- Introducing of a formal Citizenship Ceremony.

We will also examine ways of :

- Strengthening further the relationship between Government and community and voluntary organisations.
- Developing a system of academic accreditation in recognition of volunteering skills.

Ethics & Investigations

We are committed to continuing the work of ensuring that public life in Ireland achieves the highest standards and that citizens can have full confidence in the regulation of all parts of our democratic system. This is why this Government will

- Vigorously implement the full range of ethics legislation.
- Implement comprehensive reform of the legislation governing Tribunals of Inquiry so that all future Tribunals operate in accordance with modern and efficient management practices, with focused terms of reference, and in a manner which ensures that the costs and duration of Tribunals are known and controlled.
- Act, as appropriate, on the findings of all Tribunals which have yet to report.

Electoral Reform

We will:

- Establish an independent Electoral Commission to take responsibility for electoral administration and oversight.
- This Commission will have the function of implementing modern efficient practices for the conduct of elections, becoming a standing Constituency Commission for the revision of constituency boundaries.
- We will, in its terms of reference, stress the importance of avoiding, where at all possible, the division of small counties or small parts of counties into separate constituencies.
- It will also take charge of the compilation of a new national rolling electoral register.
- It will take over the functions of the Standards in Public Office Commission in relation to electoral expenditure and examine the issue of financing of the political system.

Oireachtas Reform

We will:

- Determine the extent of cross-party agreement on the recommendations of the Report on Seanad Reform to advance proposals for implementation.
- Reconsider the recommendations of the All-Party Oireachtas Committee on the Constitution regarding Dail reform.
- We will pursue the issue of reform of Oireachtas sitting times, Oireachtas procedures and strengthening the role of Committees.

Local Government Reform

We will reform local government making it more transparent and more responsive to its customers.

Green Paper on Local Government Reform

We will introduce a directly elected Mayor for Dublin with executive powers by 2011.

A Green Paper on Local Government Reform will be published within six months of coming into office. This Green Paper will examine the following areas:

- Ensuring proper balance of power at local levels between the Manager and the elected representatives.
- The issue of directly elected Mayors/Chairs.
- The establishment of town councils in those towns that have shown significant population growth in recent years (including the upgrading of the former Town Commission towns, where appropriate to full Town Councils.
- The provision of quality customer service to the public.
- Expenditure limits at local elections.

The Green Paper will be followed by a period of consultation, a White Paper and if necessary legislation in the shortest timeframe possible.

- We will put customer service to the forefront with:
 - required response times for correspondence;
 - 'customer friendly' opening hours;
 - telephone responses from real people, not machines;
 - customer training programmes; and
- a right of appeal or review of local authority decisions for customers as a further step to greater transparency.
- These changes will be set out in a Local Authority Customer Service Charter.
- We will ensure that advice given in pre-planning discussions is consistent and does not get overturned every time there is a change in planning staff.
- Taxpayers and ratepayers need to know that they are getting value for money. We will modernise the financial and budgetary processes of local authorities so that councillors and the public can readily grasp the options open to the local authority when it comes to spending and revenue raising priorities.
- We will complement this initiative by ensuring that local authority spending is overseen by powerful Audit Committees, much like the Public Accounts Committee of Dáil Éireann, with power to summon witnesses and call local authorities to account. These committees will include strong external membership with business/accounting experience.
- We will build on the experience gained from the Service Indicators initiative by putting in place more challenging indicators for the years ahead including additional indicators on environmental performance and water quality.
- We will review the operation of local government legislation to ensure that the decision making processes in local authorities are rebalanced in favour of the democratically elected representatives of the people.
- We will ensure that the library service responds to changing public demand for services as a result of the revolution in communications technology.
- We will also ensure the fire services operate to best international standards with a new community focus on fire prevention.

Good Governance

We will:

- Ensure that there is an acceptable 'buffer period' before civil servants or local government officials can take up employment in related areas of the private sector.
- Consider legislation to regulate lobbyists.

Civil Partnerships

This Government is committed to full equality for all in our society. Taking account of the options paper prepared by the Colley Group and the pending Supreme Court case, we will legislate for Civil Partnerships at the earliest possible date in the lifetime of the Government.

