



## DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL AND FAMILY AFFAIRS ANNUAL REPORT 2009

*Our mission is to promote a caring society through income and other support services, enabling active participation in society, promoting social inclusion and supporting families*

An Roinn Gnóthaí Sóisialacha agus Teaghlaigh  
Department of Social and Family Affairs  
[www.welfare.ie](http://www.welfare.ie)



**ISSN 2009-1087**  
**Government of Ireland 2010**

**(PRN A10/1068)**

## Contents

Foreword from the Minister	4
Introduction from the Secretary General	5
The Department - its business and organisation	6
2009 in Review	9
The Department's Goals	13
Goal 1 - Children and families	14
Goal 2 - People of working age	17
Goal 3 - Retired and older people	23
Goal 4 – People with disabilities	25
Goal 5 – Poverty and social inclusion	28
Goal 6 – Identity management and secure access to services	31
Goal 7 – Operational capabilities and modernisation	34
Appendix 1: Organisation Structure Chart	45
Appendix 2: Summary of the Department's 2010 Budget Package	46
Appendix 3: Control Savings and Reviews in the Department in 2009	47
Appendix 4: Legislation Enacted in 2009	50
Appendix 5: Public Procurement and Capital Appraisal	52
Appendix 6: Value for Money and Policy Reviews	54
Appendix 7: Performance Against Customer Charter Standards	57
Appendix 8: Ministers of the Department since 1947	60

## FOREWORD FROM THE MINISTER

I welcome the second report on our Department's Statement of Strategy 2008-2010. This provides an opportunity to review the delivery of social protection services vital to the lives of the citizens, families and communities of our country. It is also a record of an ongoing commitment by the Government to providing a social welfare service that meets the challenges faced by Irish society. The expenditure of some €21 billion for the provision of social welfare services in 2009 further reflects our commitment.



Effective delivery of payments is a fundamental part of our work. It is essential to the wellbeing of people and social progress. However, inextricably linked to that is the work of enabling the public to access social welfare schemes and services in an appropriate way that meets their own life needs. In essence - helping us to help you help yourself and others who depend upon you.

The core of this approach is illustrated in our Customer Action Plan 2009-2011 and new Customer Charter launched during the year. The main objective of this plan is the provision of information, financial support and other social welfare services. Our Customer Charter outlines the standards of service that the public can expect in their interaction with us. A key part of this is the customer consultation framework which provides a means for customers to give their views and comments to the Department.

Our use of technology is also key to providing more information channels to the public and providing more universal access to our services. This is embodied by our re-launched website which won the 2009 Irish eGovernment award for *"Most Accessible Government Website"*.

The economic retrenchment in 2009 resulted in a year of substantial pressure upon the staff, facilities and indeed the budget of the Department. For example, in 2009, the number of people on the live register rose from 290,000 to 424,000. I would like to thank everyone in the Department for continuing the vital work of social welfare provision in these very challenging circumstances. I would also like to acknowledge my predecessor, Minister Mary Hanafin, T.D., for all of the work she did throughout 2009.

Our main goal now is to balance the needs of people to have a decent standard of living while consolidating, insofar as is possible, the gains made in the area of social welfare over recent years. This will help protect the social cohesion that will bring us through current difficulties and will contribute to making recovery happen. Our Annual Report is a qualitative and quantitative testament of the work done by the Department in achieving this. I again thank all involved.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Eamon Ó Cuív'. The signature is stylized with a large 'E' and a prominent 'Ó'.

Éamon Ó Cuív, T.D.  
Minister for Social Protection

## INTRODUCTION FROM THE SECRETARY GENERAL

This is the second annual report prepared under the Department of Social and Family Affairs Statement of Strategy 2008 – 2010. It outlines the work done in implementing the delivery of social welfare schemes and services throughout 2009 under the strategy.



In 2009, the latest phase of decentralisation took place with the relocation of head office functions to Buncrana. This coincided with the 20th anniversary of our first decentralisation of a headquarters office to Sligo in 1989. This office has led the way in our development of new technology supports for customers and staff and in 2009 became one of the first to initiate the new corporate portal, called SOLAS, and new office systems which will mark another major transformation in the use of technology in our daily work. There were also changes at local level with various offices being relocated to more customer friendly premises. Moreover, a new appointment based system aimed at reducing queuing and waiting times was introduced in 33 local offices with more to follow.

2009 marked the 100th anniversary of the Labour Exchange Act which led to the establishment of the current network of local offices. It also marked the 30th anniversary of the introduction of Pay Related Social Insurance (PRSI) in 1979. This shows that, despite severe crisis, the social welfare system continued to survive and thrive responding to the needs of those who depend on it which, ultimately, is all of us.

The speed and scale of economic change in 2009 is the latest challenge in our history. People in need, sometimes with no prior experience of social welfare, found themselves totally reliant on us. The task of providing services to these new customers, while continuing to provide a quality service to our existing customers, put strong pressures on the Department. I would like to pay tribute to the staff of the Department for their dedication and work in a year of change, challenge and at times extreme constraint.

We have a rich tradition of serving all people, particularly the vulnerable, with care and dignity. This was displayed throughout the Department and the organisations under our aegis in 2009, especially at local and frontline level. I therefore commend everyone in remaining true to that tradition thereby making positive social welfare history of our own.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bernadette Lacey". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'L' at the end.

Bernadette Lacey  
Secretary General

## THE DEPARTMENT – ITS BUSINESS AND ORGANISATION

### The Main Functions of the Department

The Department supports the Minister in the discharge of governmental, parliamentary and departmental duties. During the year its main functions were:

- to formulate appropriate social protection and policies to promote social inclusion;
- to administer and manage the delivery of statutory and non-statutory social protection schemes and services; and
- to work with other departments and agencies in the delivery of Government policies.

Following a Government decision, with effect from 1 May 2010 the Department of Social and Family Affairs was renamed the Department of Social Protection and a number of functions in relation to Family Affairs and Social Inclusion were transferred to the newly named Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs.

### Scale of the Department's business

Our income and support services impact on the lives of almost every person in the State. Some 1.4 million people each week claim a social welfare payment and, when qualified adults and children are included, a total of almost 2.1 million people benefit from weekly payments. Over 600,000 families receive child benefit payments in respect of over 1.2 million children each month. The total expenditure by the Department in 2009 was €20.5 billion. At present the day-to-day activities of the Department include:

- some 50 separate schemes and services;
- some 2.5 million applications cleared in the year;
- over 6.5 million telephone calls to the Department;
- over 83 million payments;
- over 425,000 assignments conducted by inspectors;
- over 750,000 control reviews;
- promotion and distribution countrywide of over 60 different information booklets/leaflets and a wide range of forms; and
- processing applications for Personal Public Service Numbers for customers from some 200 countries.

During the year over 3.37 million employee PRSI returns were received in respect of 2008, a decrease of 3.5% from the previous year. Some 263,000 returns from self-employed people were received in respect of the 2007 tax year, a decrease of some 16%. The social insurance element of the PRSI contribution goes to the Social Insurance Fund (SIF) which helps pay for social welfare benefits and pensions. Income to the Social Insurance Fund was €7.304 billion for the year. Expenditure from the Social Insurance Fund in 2009 was €9.747 billion. The balance remaining in the fund at the end of 2009 was €934 million.

### Organisation of the Department

The Department has over 5,000 staff (4,743 full-time equivalent posts). The organisation structure is set out in **Appendix 1**. The headquarters offices are located in Buncrana, Carrick-on-Shannon, Dublin, Dundalk, Letterkenny, Longford, Roscommon, Sligo and Waterford. There is a nationwide network of 125 Social Welfare Local Offices and Branch Offices.

The Combat Poverty Agency was integrated with the Office for Social Inclusion in 2009 to create a new Social Inclusion Division<sup>1</sup>. The Division works with Government Departments and in consultation with the social partners and other stakeholders in monitoring the implementation of the *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion, 2007-2016*. [www.socialinclusion.ie](http://www.socialinclusion.ie)

#### *General Register Office/Civil Registration Service*

The Civil Registration Service provides the system of registrations of births, stillbirths, adoptions, deaths and marriages in the State. The service is managed by the General Register Office (GRO) while registration services are provided by registrars appointed by the Health Service Executive at various locations across the State. The GRO headquarters are in Roscommon and the GRO operates a genealogy research facility in Dublin. [www.groireland.ie](http://www.groireland.ie)

#### *Social Welfare Appeals Office*

The Social Welfare Appeals Office is an office of the Department independently responsible for determining appeals against decisions on social welfare entitlements, insurability of employment issues and certain decisions made by the Health Service Executive under the Supplementary Welfare Allowance Schemes. [www.socialwelfareappeals.ie](http://www.socialwelfareappeals.ie)

### **Statutory Agencies under the aegis of the Department**

The Citizens Information Board is the national agency responsible for supporting the provision of information, advice and advocacy on social services and for the provision of the Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS). [www.citizensinformationboard.ie](http://www.citizensinformationboard.ie)

The Pensions Board is responsible for overseeing the implementation of the Pensions Act which concerns the regulation of occupational pensions and Personal Retirement Savings Accounts. The Board also advises the Minister in relation to pension policy. [www.pensionsboard.ie](http://www.pensionsboard.ie)

The Office of the Pensions Ombudsman investigates complaints of financial losses, due to maladministration and disputes of fact or law, in relation to occupational pension schemes and Personal Retirement Savings Accounts. The Pensions Ombudsman is a statutory officer and exercises his functions independently. [www.pensionsombudsman.ie](http://www.pensionsombudsman.ie)

The Family Support Agency<sup>2</sup> provides a direct, nationwide family mediation service and supports, promotes and develops the provision of marriage and relationship counselling, other family supports and the Family and Community Services Resource Centre Programme. [www.fsa.ie](http://www.fsa.ie)

The Social Welfare Tribunal<sup>3</sup> is a statutory body set up in 1982 to deal with cases where entitlement to Jobseeker's Benefit or Jobseeker's Allowance is refused due to an involvement in a trade dispute. Where a person feels that they have been unreasonably deprived of employment because their employer refused or failed to follow the negotiating machinery available for settling disputes, they may apply to the Tribunal for adjudication on the matter.

---

<sup>1</sup> In April 2010 the Government reassigned responsibility for the Social Inclusion Division to the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs.

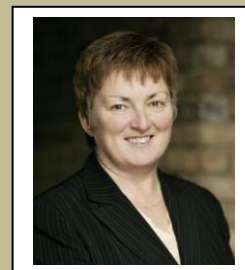
<sup>2</sup> In April 2010 the Government reassigned responsibility for the Family Support Agency to the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.welfare.ie/EN/OperationalGuidelines/Pages/socweltrib.aspx>

# ***MANAGEMENT BOARD***



**BERNADETTE LACEY**  
Secretary General



**NIAMH O'DONOGHUE**  
Director General



**BRIAN Ó RAGHALLAIGH**  
Assistant Secretary



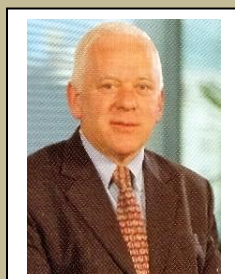
**GERRY DALY\***  
Assistant Director General



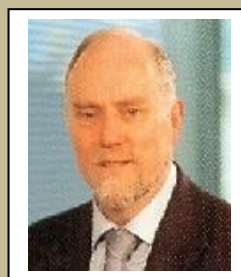
**VERA DERVAN\***  
Director



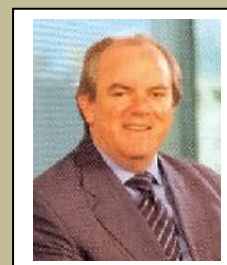
**ALICE O'FLYNN**  
Assistant Secretary



**OLIVER RYAN\***  
Assistant Director General



**TOM MULHERIN\***  
Assistant Secretary



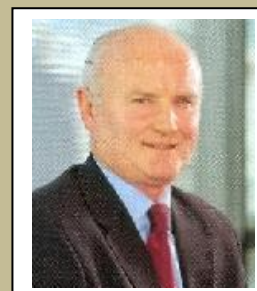
**GERRY MANGAN\***  
Director



**NIALL BARRY**  
Assistant Secretary



**MAUREEN WALDRON**  
Director



**EOIN O'BROIN**  
Director

\*Retired during 2009



## 2009 IN REVIEW

### Economic Context

The Irish economy weakened considerably over the course of 2009, continuing the negative trend started in 2008. Gross National Product (GNP) declined by 11.3% in the year to December 2009.

CSO statistics showed continuing increases in unemployment over the course of 2009. Recorded unemployment was at 12.4% in Quarter 4, compared to 7.6% at the same time in 2008. Employment fell by 166,900 or 8.1% over the year since Quarter 4 2008. Part-time employment increased by 26,400 while full-time employment fell by 193,200. The largest decreases in full-time employment were in Construction (-84,700), Industry (-33,000), and Wholesale and retail trade: repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles (-28,500).

### Budgetary Measures

Budget 2009 was announced in October 2008 and provided for a range of improvements in social welfare schemes. These included increases of approximately 3% in the weekly personal and qualified adult rates of payment; extended eligibility for entitlement to the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance; an 11% increase for Fuel Allowance and the duration of the fuel season extended by two weeks per annum. The Government also introduced a supplementary budget in April 2009 because of the prevailing economic circumstances.

A number of measures designed to control expenditure were announced in both Budget 2009 and the April 2009 supplementary budget. These measures included:

- Reduction of three months in the period of entitlement to Jobseeker's Benefit;
- Reduction in the rate of Jobseeker's Allowance and Supplementary Welfare Allowance for new claimants under the age of 20;
- Increase in the weekly earnings threshold for entitlement to a maximum rate of Jobseeker's Benefit, Illness Benefit and Health and Safety Benefit;
- Increase in the underlying number of paid contributions for entitlement to Jobseeker's Benefit, Illness Benefit and Health & Safety Benefit;
- Limitation of entitlement to Illness Benefit to a maximum of two years;
- Minimum weekly contribution by claimant of Rent & Mortgage Interest Supplement schemes increased and additional entry restrictions introduced.

It was also announced in the April budget that social welfare recipients would not be receiving a bonus payment in December 2009. Budget 2010, announced in December 2009, provided for expenditure of €21 billion on social welfare in 2010, or €676 million (3.3%) more than the projected outcome for 2009. Further details are outlined at Appendix 2.

### Policy Developments

#### Customer Action Plan and Customer Charter

Following an extensive consultation process with customers, customer representatives, staff, and stakeholders, the new Customer Charter and Customer Action Plan 2009-2011<sup>4</sup> was launched in May 2009. The Customer Action Plan sets out the Department's aims and actions for the next three years and is a key part of the Government's objective of attaining greater efficiency in delivering public services in an affordable way and using modern technology to best effect. The new Customer Charter

---

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.welfare.ie/EN/Policy/CorporatePublications/HowWeWork/Pages/CustAct20092011.aspx>

sets out the standards of service that people can expect in their dealings with the Department. It is displayed in all the Department's offices and on the website.

### **Profiling of Unemployed**

As part of a national longitudinal study, in September 2009, the Minister launched the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) report entitled "*National Profiling of the Unemployed in Ireland*".<sup>5</sup> Legislative provision for capturing profile data, and for its use in selecting claimants for intervention, was made in the Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2009.

### **Longitudinal Study**

The National Longitudinal Study of Children '*Growing Up in Ireland*' monitors the development of 18,000 children. The data collected from the nine-year-old cohort have now been analysed and the first in a series of inter-related policy oriented reports was published in 2009. Fieldwork was completed in 2009 on the nine-month cohort which involved 10,000 nine month-old infants and their families. The inaugural Research Conference was held in Dublin Castle in December 2009.

### **Green Paper on Pensions**

The Green Paper on Pensions outlined the challenges facing the Irish pensions system in the years ahead, including the sustainability of the system over the longer term in light of demographic change and the adequacy of contribution levels and benefits. Work on the development of a long term national pensions framework continued during 2009<sup>6</sup>.

### **Disability Sectoral Plan**

The review of the Department's Disability Sectoral Plan 2006-2009, and drafting of a new Sectoral Plan in respect of the period 2010-2012, was completed. A comprehensive consultation process was undertaken with a wide spectrum of interests including customers and staff, disability stakeholders and service providers, and the general public.

A Carer's Allowance customer survey was issued in December 2009 as recommended under the Disability Sectoral Plan, and the results of this survey will be collated and analysed during 2010.

### **EU and International Social Security Policies**

The Department continues to work with EU partners and during the year commenced a project to replace the current, predominantly paper-based exchanges of social security information with an electronic data exchange across all member States. New regulations apply from 1 May 2010.

In October 2009, the North/South Joint Secretariat facilitated a meeting with the authorities from both sides of the border to deal with issues in relation to social welfare entitlements, with particular reference to the impact of EU regulations on those regarded as frontier workers.

A bilateral agreement on social security with Japan was signed in October 2009. The agreement will facilitate the development of business interests in both countries and enhance protection for contributory pensions for people who have worked in both countries.

## **Control Measures and Reviews**

The Department's policy is to pursue all those who defraud the social welfare system and employers who fail to comply with their statutory obligations with regard to social welfare legislation, including recourse to prosecution where appropriate. During the year, 308 cases were forwarded to the Chief

---

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.esri.ie/UserFiles/publications/20090825142343/RS010.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> National Pensions Framework (March 2010) - [http://www.pensionsgreenpaper.ie/publications\\_nationalframework.html](http://www.pensionsgreenpaper.ie/publications_nationalframework.html)

State Solicitor's Office for the initiation of court proceedings; 356 cases were finalised in court and over 750,000 control reviews were carried out yielding savings of €484 million.

Scheme review policies focus control activity on the high risk areas within schemes and on claims that have been identified as having a higher risk of fraud and abuse. In the Child Benefit scheme some 288,000 reviews were carried out giving savings of some €90m; in Jobseeker schemes some 142,000 reviews yielded savings of €60m; in Illness schemes approximately 182,000 reviews gave savings of nearly €90m; and in State Pensions, Widows(er)'s Pension and Household Benefit Schemes some 35,600 reviews yielded savings of some €104 million.

In relation to those claiming an illness or occupational injury benefit, the Department's ongoing Renaissance Project provides for an early, integrated, multidisciplinary intervention to identify susceptible persons with simple low back pain and prevent their progression to chronic back pain. Some 24,000 customers have been referred for medical review since the start of the project in January 2003 to the end of 2009. Of the number referred, almost 14,400 submitted a final certificate while some 3,000 were found capable of work which resulted in a claim closure rate of 73%.

## **Service Delivery**

### **Supporting Children**

Automated processing of child benefit claims ensured that over 90% of claims were processed within the ten day target. Children born in Ireland are processed either fully automatically or in a partially automatic way using the child's birth details when registered with the General Register Office.

The numbers qualifying for the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance (BTSCFA) increased substantially in 2009, with almost 140,000 families and 280,000 children qualifying for the payment compared with 102,000 families and 200,000 children in 2008.

### **Local/Branch Office Initiatives**

Due to the downturn in the economy and subsequent job losses, the Department's network of local offices and branch offices have come under unprecedented pressure in processing large volumes of unemployment claims.

To alleviate some of this pressure new procedures have been introduced to improve the claim acceptance and decisions process. These include a new appointment system in 33 local offices which will be extended to other offices; self certification for employees with casual work arrangements; and the provision of on-line services for jobseekers on [www.welfare.ie](http://www.welfare.ie). Since May 2008, some 400 extra staff have also been assigned to local offices, to new central support units and to the Department's Inspectorate.

### **State Pensions**

The State Pension area continued to progress the service delivery modernisation programme and the transition to paperless claim processing. This, along with the associated organisational change and improved reporting structures, saw 90% of State Pension (Transition) claims being processed in 6 weeks and 90% of State Pension (Contributory) claims processed by date of entitlement.

### **Payment Services**

Some 7 million payment transactions are issued each month to 2.4m social welfare recipients. By the end of 2009 some 92% of recipients were being paid electronically - 46% using a social services card at the post office and 46% by electronic fund transfer to an account in a financial institution.

The Department's strategy is to replace all paper based payment instruments with an electronic payment method. The process of moving customers from Personal Payable Order (PPO) books to payment by social services card at a post office was completed in September 2009 for the approximately 97,000 remaining customers.

**Transfer of income support schemes**

The Domiciliary Care Allowance scheme was transferred from the Health Service Executive (HSE) to the Department during the year. From April 2009 all new claims were dealt with by the Department with the existing customers transferred in September. There are approximately 25,000 recipients of Domiciliary Care Allowance.

**Transfer of the Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) to the Citizens Information Board (CIB)**

Governance functions for the Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) were successfully transferred from the Department to the Citizens Information Board (CIB) in July 2009. The experience of the Citizens Information Board in providing strong management support to the voluntary and community sector in the provision of a quality local public service is well recognised and this new structure will provide MABS with strong national leadership in meeting the challenges posed by the changing face of debt in Ireland.

**Accommodation and Decentralisation**

A new local office was opened in King's Inns Street, Dublin to replace the office in North Cumberland Street. Local offices in Dun Laoghaire, Cork, Belmullet, Limerick, Ballyfermot, Longford and Letterkenny underwent refurbishment. Maternity Benefits section and Client Eligibility Services decentralised 87 posts to the Department's new offices in Buncrana, Co Donegal.

## **THE DEPARTMENT'S GOALS**

The Department's Statement of Strategy 2008-2010 presents our high level goals, as follows:

### **Goal 1: CHILDREN AND FAMILIES**

**To contribute to the well-being of children and families through income and other supports and facilitate participation in employment**

### **Goal 2: PEOPLE OF WORKING AGE**

**To provide income and other supports to people of working age and to facilitate them in taking up employment, training, education or development opportunities**

### **Goal 3: RETIRED AND OLDER PEOPLE**

**To provide and promote adequate, secure and sustainable pensions and other appropriate supports for retired and older people**

### **Goal 4: PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES**

**To provide income and other supports to people with disabilities and to facilitate them in taking up employment, training, education or development opportunities**

### **Goal 5: POVERTY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION**

**To attain better outcomes in tackling poverty and achieve a more inclusive society through the provision of income and other support services and co-ordinating implementation of Government strategies for social inclusion**

### **Goal 6: IDENTITY MANAGEMENT AND SECURE ACCESS TO SERVICES**

**To establish and authenticate customer identity for public services and to support the development and deployment of a public service-wide identity policy framework**

### **Goal 7: OPERATIONAL CAPABILITIES AND MODERNISATION**

**To develop further an effective, adaptable and capable organisation and a culture of excellence**

## GOAL 1 - CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

***To contribute to the well-being of children and families through income and other supports and facilitate participation in employment***

### Context

During 2009, some 600,000 customers received Child Benefit in respect of 1.2 million children; the Early Childcare Supplement<sup>7</sup> was paid to 264,000 customers in respect of 340,000 children; and 11,000 customers were entitled to the new compensatory payment (see below).

Support for children and families is provided through child benefit, qualified child payments, family income supplement, back to school clothing and footwear allowance, and the school meals programme.

### 2009 Budgetary Measures

- Increase of €2 per week (8.3%) to €26 in the qualified child increase. This ensured that the level of overall child income support (consisting of Child Benefit, the qualified child increase and the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance) remains within the income support targets for children in the *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion*.
- The rate of Child Benefit for 18 year olds was halved with effect from January 2009 and entitlement in respect of 18 year olds ceased with effect from January 2010. A number of compensatory mechanisms were introduced to protect households on social welfare that were affected by these measures. In 2009 and 2010, a special additional payment of €15 per week is payable for any week a person is receiving a social welfare payment which includes an increase for an 18 year old or a Family Income Supplement payment for that child. This special additional payment is also paid for any week during which the child in question is receiving a Disability Allowance payment in their own right. Higher rates are payable in respect of twins and other multiple births. In addition, the rate of Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance payable in respect of relevant 18 year olds is increased by €215, to €520 for 2009 and 2010.
- Family Income Supplement was improved through an increase in the earnings thresholds of €10 per child. This means that families in receipt of FIS gained an additional €6 per week.
- The income threshold for eligibility for the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance was increased by €50 per week.

### Policy Developments

#### Longitudinal Study

The National Longitudinal Study of Children in Ireland 'Growing Up in Ireland', see [www.growingup.ie](http://www.growingup.ie), is the most significant of its kind to be undertaken in the State. The aim of this study is 'to examine the factors which contribute to or undermine the well-being of children in contemporary Irish families, and, through this, contribute to the setting of effective and responsive policies relating to children and to the design of services for children and their families'. It will monitor the development of 18,000 children – an infant cohort of 10,000 and a nine-year-old cohort of 8,000 children - yielding important information about each significant transition throughout their young lives.

---

<sup>7</sup> The Early Childcare Supplement was replaced in 2010 by a free pre-school year in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme administered by the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs. See [http://www.welfare.ie/EN/Topics/Budget/bud09\\_apr/Pages/ECES.aspx](http://www.welfare.ie/EN/Topics/Budget/bud09_apr/Pages/ECES.aspx)

This study was commissioned in 2006 by the Department of Health and Children through the Office of the Minister for Children in association with the Department of Social and Family Affairs and the Central Statistics Office. It is being carried out by the ESRI and Trinity College Dublin. It is overseen by a project team and a high-level steering group, comprising officials from the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, the Department of Social Protection, the Department of Education and Skills and the Central Statistics Office.

The data collected from the nine-year-old cohort have now been analysed and the first in a series of inter-related policy oriented reports *Growing Up In Ireland – The Lives of 9 Year Olds*, was launched at the inaugural Research Conference held in Dublin Castle in December 2009. These children and their families will be revisited in four years time when the children are 13 years old to see how they have grown and how their lives have changed. Fieldwork was completed in April 2009 on the nine-month cohort which involved 10,000 nine month-old infants and their families, and a report will be published in 2010.

### **Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Family Affairs**

The Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Family Affairs took place in Vienna in June 2009. The theme of the conference was *“Public policies supporting the wish to have children: societal, economic and personal factors”*.

Some 40 Heads of Delegation attended, including Minister Mary Hanafin T.D. The Minister contributed in Working Session I: Why many Europeans have fewer children than they actually want: Societal and Economic Factors. Some interesting best practice initiatives were outlined in Working Session II: Family-friendly policies: measures for an optimal framework.

## **Service Delivery**

### **Child Benefit**

Automated processing of child benefit claims ensured that over 90% of claims were processed within the ten day target. Children born in Ireland are processed either fully automatically or in a partially automatic way using the child’s birth details when registered with the General Register Office. Some 59,000 claims for extended benefit for children over 16 years of age were processed within a day of receipt using scanning and automated processing procedures. This represents 69% of all claims for this category.

### **Family Income Supplement (FIS)**

Family income supplement provides support to lower income families with children where one or both of the couple is in employment of at least 19 hours per week.

- Some 41,800 applications (both new and renewal claims) were processed in 2009.
- Payments were made to some 26,000 families with over 55,700 children.

### **Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance**

The Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance provides assistance in respect of certain qualifying school-going children. The scheme operates from June to September each year and provides once-off lump sum payments in respect of eligible children.

The numbers qualifying for the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance (BSCFA) increased substantially in 2009, with almost 140,000 families and 280,000 children qualifying for the payment compared with 102,000 families and 200,000 children in 2008.

### **School Meals**

Almost €35m was spent on the School Meals Programme in 2009. Priority for funding is given to schools in the Department of Education and Skills initiative for disadvantaged schools –*“Delivering*

*Equality of Opportunity in Schools*” (DEIS). Thirteen DEIS schools joined the programme in 2009 and children from approximately 85% of DEIS schools benefit from the programme. In total, the programme benefits 196,000 children from almost 2,000 schools.



## GOAL 2 - PEOPLE OF WORKING AGE

***To provide income and other supports to people of working age and to facilitate them in taking up employment, training, education or development opportunities***

### Context

During 2009, some 634,000 people of working age were in receipt of payments from the Department. These were paid mainly in respect of jobseeker, illness, caring<sup>8</sup>, maternity, employment supports and one-parent families. In addition, the Department has a range of supports available to assist customers of working age back into employment, education and training.

The labour force decreased by some 69,000 from Quarter 4 of 2008 to 2,155,200 in Quarter 4 of 2009. The proportion of all persons aged 15 and over in the labour force declined from 62.9% to 61.2% in the same period. The average monthly Live Register for 2009 was 398,200. This compares with some 227,000 for 2008. At the beginning of 2009, the Live Register was 290,000 and by the end of December 2009 it had increased to 423,600.

### 2009 Budgetary Measures

- The personal rate of all working age payments increased by €6.50 per week, bringing the lowest rate of payment to €204.30 per week.
- The increase for qualified adults for most working age schemes was €4.30 per week.
- The minimum rate of Maternity and Adoptive Benefits increased by €8.50 to €230.30 per week.
- The Fuel Allowance increased by €2 to €20 per week.
- The duration of the fuel season was increased by two weeks, to 32 weeks, in April 2009.
- Carer's Allowance for those aged 66 or over increased by €7 to €239 and by €6.50 to €220.50 for those aged under 66.
- Carer's Benefit increased by €6.50 to €221.20 per week.
- Reduction of three months in the period of entitlement to Jobseeker's Benefit.
- Increase in the weekly earnings threshold for entitlement to a maximum rate of Jobseeker's Benefit, Illness Benefit and Health and Safety Benefit.
- Increase in the underlying number of paid contributions for entitlement to Jobseeker's Benefit, Illness Benefit and Health & Safety Benefit.
- Limitation of entitlement to Illness Benefit to a maximum of two years.

#### Jobseeker's Allowance Measures

In order to incentivise 18 and 19 year old jobseekers to avail of education and training opportunities and try to avoid them becoming welfare dependent from a young age, changes were made to the Jobseeker's Allowance.

From May 2009, the rate of Jobseeker's Allowance payable to new claimants under the age of 20 is €100 per week. This rate does not apply to persons who have exhausted their entitlement to Jobseeker's Benefit or to those with dependent children.

---

<sup>8</sup> Some 18% of Carers would fall into the category of Retired or Older People

The full adult rate of the relevant scheme is paid to 18 and 19 year olds who:

- participate in a full-time *Youthreach*<sup>9</sup> course for young early school leavers or a full-time course in a *Senior Traveller Training Centre*<sup>10</sup>;
- qualify for the Back to Education Allowance (BTEA) for pursuing a full-time second level course or post leaving certificate (PLC) course (to qualify for the BTEA they must have been out of formal education for at least 2 years and been in receipt of a jobseekers payment for at least 3 months); or
- participate in a full-time FÁS training course.

They can also participate on a PLC course or third level course on the same basis as any other young person and may qualify for a third level grant. This measure also applies to new claimants of Supplementary Welfare Allowance (SWA) who are under 20 years of age.

## Policy Developments

### Profiling of Unemployed

In 2006, the Department, in conjunction with the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI), commenced the data capture phase of a national longitudinal study. The aim of the study was to develop a statistical model which would predict who is likely to become long-term unemployed. In September 2009, the Minister launched the ESRI report on the study entitled "*National Profiling of the Unemployed in Ireland*"<sup>11</sup>.

Legislative provision for capturing profile data, and for its use in selecting claimants for intervention, was made in the Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2009.

### Study on single social assistance payment for working age people

A study on the desirability and feasibility of introducing a single social assistance payment for people of working age commenced in early 2009 and is nearing completion. The study examines the extent to which a single payment, coupled with appropriate services and other supports, could facilitate people of working age to take up employment, training, education or development opportunities having regard to their capacity, capability and development needs.

The rationale for a single payment is based on both the Department's Strategy Statement (2008-2010)<sup>12</sup> and the NESC Report – *The Developmental Welfare State* (2005)<sup>13</sup>.

### Lone Parents

The Government discussion paper, "*Proposals for Supporting Lone Parents*," put forward proposals to tackle obstacles to employment for lone parents and other low income families. These proposals are being considered along with options for limiting the length of time for which the One-Parent Family Payment can be paid. Income supports are only one element of the supports required by those parenting alone. Other co-ordinated supports and services required include access to childcare support, education, training and activation measures.

In November 2009, a new FÁS model of support to socially excluded groups, with a particular focus on lone parents, was rolled out in Tallaght and Finglas. This model will help people overcome barriers and increase their opportunity to access training and employment programmes and ultimately the open labour market.

---

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.youthreach.ie/>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.education.ie/home/home.jsp?pcategory=10900&ecategory=14961&language=EN>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.esri.ie/UserFiles/publications/20090825142343/RS010.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.welfare.ie/EN/Policy/CorporatePublications/StrategicPlansAndReports/Pages/strat0810.aspx>

<sup>13</sup> [http://www.nesc.ie/inside\\_development.asp](http://www.nesc.ie/inside_development.asp)

The Department is engaged in ongoing discussions with the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs regarding the provision of childcare. Progress to date includes:

- €1 billion invested in childcare infrastructure resulting in 65,000 childcare places;
- 1,000 community services now in the Community Childcare Subvention Scheme with provision for 30,000 full-time equivalent children;
- 18,000 parents using the services.

### **PRSI Exemption Scheme**

The Employer's PRSI Exemption scheme exempts employers from their share of the PRSI contribution in respect of workers for the first two years of their employment. In 2009 there were 213 exemptions approved. The scheme was closed to new recipients from 1 May 2009 in line with the Supplementary Budget in April 2009.

A new Employer Job (PRSI) Incentive Scheme, designed to support job creation, was announced as part of the 2010 Budget.

## **Service Delivery**

### **Claim Processing**

- 639,000 jobseekers claims processed, an increase of 45% on the previous year.
- 19,700 One-Parent Family Payment applications were processed.
- 312,000 Illness Benefit claims processed, some 36,000 (13%) above estimates for 2009.
- 15,000 Occupational Injury Benefit claims processed, some 3,400 (30%) above estimates.
- The average time taken to award an Illness Benefit claim was one week, and claims from customers who have no other income, i.e. those not paid by their employer while out sick, were prioritised and were processed within 3 days.
- The "stand-alone" Respite Care Grant was paid to 5,096 carers in respect of 2009 and a further 1,278 grants were paid in respect of 2008.
- 418,000 customers claimed a free dental examination at a cost of over €14m.
- 219,000 free eye examinations were provided at a cost of almost €5.5m.
- 7,500 treatments were provided under the medical appliance scheme at a cost of €7.5m.

### **Local/Branch Office Initiatives**

Due to the downturn in the economy and subsequent job losses, the Department's network of local offices and branch offices came under unprecedented pressure in processing large volumes of unemployment claims. To alleviate some of this pressure a number of new procedures were introduced to improve the claim acceptance and decisions process. They include:

- An appointment system whereby claimants can have their claim taken and decided during the appointment. This particular initiative has helped greatly in reducing waiting times in the 33 local offices where it is now in operation and will be extended to other offices.
- A more streamlined procedure for claimants moving to Jobseeker's Allowance when their Jobseeker's Benefit expires.
- A streamlined process for people who had a claim in the previous two years.
- Application forms for the jobseeker schemes are now available on the Department's website. This means that anyone who wants to make a claim can print the form at home and bring it to the local office completed.
- Improved procedures for providing evidence of identity and address have been introduced.
- The process for casual employees has been streamlined and the employee can now self certify on a weekly basis without recourse to the employer. A compensatory periodic control measure has been introduced.
- An on-line 'sign-off' service on [www.welfare.ie](http://www.welfare.ie) for some 40 local offices.

In addition, some 400 extra staff were assigned to local offices, to new central support units and to the Department's Inspectorate.

### **Activation**

Throughout 2009 the Department continued to develop the activation provisions of its 2008 – 2010 Statement of Strategy, namely to facilitate people of working age in taking up employment, education, training or development opportunities. The programme includes those on unemployment, illness and one-parent family payments. The Department worked with officials from other Government departments on the Senior Officials Group on Economic Renewal and the Senior Officials Group on Labour Market Issues with a view to progressing the activation agenda. The Department also continued to work closely with FÁS to ensure maximum utilisation of the National Employment Action Plan interview capacity for people on the Live Register. Referral capacity was increased by approximately 100% on the 2008 figure and there was a 50% increase in the number of facilitators in the Department.

A number of improvements were made to the Department's employment and educational support schemes in response to the changing economic environment. Resources were refocused on supporting people into self-employment and a new Short Term Enterprise Allowance was introduced. In addition, the qualifying period for access to the Back to Education Allowance was reduced to facilitate those on welfare payments wishing to return to education. At the end of December 2009 there were:

- 4,591 participating in the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance Scheme,
- 2,012 participating in the Back to Work Allowance employee strand,
- 1,152 participating in the Short Term Enterprise Allowance Scheme.

In May 2009, an information leaflet issued to 54,000 people under 25 years of age who were more than 3 months on the Live Register to advise them of the education supports available and to encourage them to gain additional skills and qualifications.

### ***Employment Support Services***

#### National Employment Action Plan

The National Employment Action Plan is the main welfare to work measure under which all persons between the ages of 18 and 65 years who are approaching 3 months on the Live Register are identified and referred to FÁS for interview. It is a key element in addressing the progression needs of those on the Live Register by assisting them enter/re-enter the labour market.

In 2009, the Job Search Supports capacity under the NEAP increased from 6,500 per month to 12,250 per month, thus increasing the interview capacity of the National Employment Service accordingly.

86,782 persons were referred to FÁS in 2009, and of those a total of 53,638 (62%) left the Live Register during the year.

#### Back to Work Allowance Scheme (BTWA)

The Back to Work Allowance scheme is part of the Department's programme of initiatives designed to assist long-term unemployed people, lone parents, people with disabilities and other social welfare recipients to take up opportunities of paid employment or self employment.

In order to respond effectively to the growing numbers on the Live Register and the employment situation, it was decided in the context of the 2009 supplementary budget to refocus resources on the enterprise strand of the Back to Work Allowance which supports people into self employment. The changes were effective from 1 May 2009 and provided for:

- A reduction in the qualifying period required for access to Back to Work Enterprise Allowance (BTWEA) from 2 years to 12 months provided a person has an underlying entitlement to Jobseeker's Allowance. This is in conjunction with a reduction in the period for which the BTWEA is payable from 4 years to 2 years, at 100% of existing social welfare entitlement in the first year and 75% in the second.

- Immediate access to a shorter BTWEA, Short Term Enterprise Allowance, for certain Jobseeker's Benefit recipients or those who qualify for statutory redundancy. It will be paid for the duration of the Jobseeker's Benefit claim entitlement.
- Allow certain people who previously participated in the BTWEA scheme to participate a second time after a period of at least 5 years has elapsed.
- The employee strand of the Back to Work Allowance scheme was closed to new applicants on 1 May 2009.

### Employment Incentives

In order to assist in a person's recovery from illness with a view to them ultimately rejoining the workforce, people receiving illness benefit may receive an exemption to take up part-time employment or participate in an educational/training programme. During the year some 2,850 requests were received and at the end of 2009 some 2,050 people were in receipt of an exemption.

In June 2009 the Department hosted the International Social Security Association (ISSA) Technical Seminar on Employment Incentives for Older Workers. The seminar focused on the underlying challenges of an ageing population, in the context of the global economic downturn, and discussed innovative approaches to address these challenges and examples of good practices in a range of countries including Ireland, France, Belgium, Portugal, Netherlands, Canada and Germany.

### ***Education Support Services***

#### Facilitator Service

One of the main elements of the activation programme is to expand the Department's facilitator service which was enhanced under the National Development Plan Social and Economic Participation Programme. There are currently 70 job facilitator posts.

Facilitators who are located throughout the country work closely with FÁS and other agencies at a local level to identify and target appropriate education, training and development opportunities for people who wish to avail of the service.

#### Back to Education Allowance

In the 2008/2009 academic year a total of 11,646 people (5,087 at 2<sup>nd</sup> level, 6,559 at 3<sup>rd</sup> level) were in receipt of Back to Education Allowance. The scheme facilitates the long-term unemployed, lone parents and other social welfare recipients in gaining access to second chance education, either at second or third level, by payment of a weekly allowance. The objective of the scheme is to raise educational qualifications and skills levels among the long-term unemployed and other disadvantaged groups in order that they will meet the requirements of the modern labour market.

The following changes were made in the Supplementary Budget in April 2009

- The qualifying period of six months was reduced to three months for access to the second level option.
- Jobseekers who engage with the Department's facilitator programme can access the third level option at nine months on the recommendation of a facilitator.

#### Technical Assistance and Training Fund

Funding of €3.5m was provided to assist some 6,700 people under the Technical Assistance and Training Fund. It provides assistance towards the training and business related expenses of Back to Work participants and other social welfare recipients. This can include preparation of business plans/marketing strategy, financial projections and business accounts, computer training, small items of equipment or assistance towards the cost of personal liability insurance.

### 2nd Chance Education Fund

Grant funding of €290,000 was provided to encourage those in target groups or areas of special disadvantage to return to education and training as a means of improving their educational qualifications with a view to returning to the labour force. The 2nd chance education grants provide additional flexibility in funding projects and courses not covered under other schemes such as the Activation and Family Support Programme and Back to Education Allowance scheme.

### Activation and Family Support Programme

Funding of €4.8m was provided to the Activation and Family Support Programme which aims to assist individuals and families to enhance their employability through education, training and personal development opportunities and to improve their quality of life. The programme provides local communities with resources to enhance social inclusion and improve employability in a positive way.

The priority of the programme is to target people who find it most difficult to access employment and the means to achieving improved quality of life. Activities funded under the programme include:

- parenting projects for young lone parents and disadvantaged families,
- support programmes for families of disabled persons,
- personal development courses,
- computer training,
- career planning,
- literacy/numeracy and life skills.

### **PRSI**

During 2009, over 3.37 million employee returns were received from the Revenue Commissioners for 2008, a decrease of 3.5% from the previous year. Some 263,000 returns from self-employed people were received in respect of the 2007 tax year, a decrease of some 16% or 50,000 cases from the previous year. A new strategy on the follow-up of part-paid self-employed contributors has been developed in conjunction with the Revenue Commissioners.

In 2009 PRSI retention certificates were issued for 6,100 customers, an increase of 24% on 2008 levels. End of year returns were received from 504 employers in respect of some 7,500 employees who continue to be insured under Irish social security law while they are temporarily posted to another country, either under EU regulations or a relevant bilateral agreement. PRSI to the value of €29.6 million was received in respect of these employees, a 2% increase on 2008. Income to the Social Insurance Fund was €7.304 billion for the year. Expenditure from the Social Insurance Fund in 2009 was €9.747 billion. The balance remaining in the fund at the end of 2009 was €934 million.

## GOAL 3 - RETIRED AND OLDER PEOPLE

***To provide and promote adequate, secure and sustainable pensions and other appropriate supports for retired and older people***

### Context

During 2009, over 445,000 people were in receipt of State Pension (Transition, Contributory and Non-Contributory) or Widow/Widowers Pension<sup>14</sup> while some 68,500 qualified adults also benefited. In addition, there were 373,000 recipients of the Household Benefits Package (Electricity/Gas Allowance, Free Television Licence and Telephone Allowance) and 674,000 recipients of the Free Travel Pass the majority of whom were in receipt of pensions for older people.

CSO statistics (EU- Survey on Income and Living Conditions)<sup>15</sup> published in 2009 showed that the consistent poverty rate for older people (65+ years) fell from 2% to 1.4% in 2008, and the Government's target as set out in the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion has now been met.

### 2009 Budgetary Measures

Budget 2009 provided for a €7 per week increase in the personal rate of payment for all pensioners aged 66 or over (aged 65 in the case of Invalidity Pension) with proportionate increases for all persons in receipt of reduced contributory rates of payment.

Budget 2009 also provided for qualified adult increases which came into effect in January 2009 as follows:

- State Pension (Contributory) and State Pension (Transition) qualified adults (aged under 66 years) - increase of €4.70 per week;
- State Pension (Non-Contributory) qualified adults (aged under 66 years) - increase of €4.60 per week;
- State Pension (Contributory) and State Pension (Transition) qualified adults (aged 66 years and over) - increase of €6.30 per week.

### Policy Developments

#### Green Paper on Pensions

The Green Paper on Pensions outlined the challenges facing the Irish pensions system in the years ahead, including the sustainability of the system over the longer term in light of demographic change and the adequacy of contribution levels and benefits. The consultation process which followed its publication reflected the wide range of views and interests held by individuals and organisations throughout the country. While there was no consensus on ways to respond to the challenges facing our pension system, it was clear that there were significant issues and problems that people wanted addressed. Work on the development of a long term national pensions framework continued during 2009<sup>16</sup>.

#### Promotion of supplementary pension provision

The 2009 National Pensions Awareness Campaign included an online campaign targeting specific audiences known to have low pension coverage, as well as the general public. The Pensions Board

<sup>14</sup> Some 30% of contributory Widows/Widowers pensioners fall into the category of People of Working Age.

<sup>15</sup> [http://www.cso.ie/releasespublications/documents/silc/2008/silc\\_2008.pdf](http://www.cso.ie/releasespublications/documents/silc/2008/silc_2008.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> National Pensions Framework was published March 2010 and is available at [www.pensionsgreenpaper.ie](http://www.pensionsgreenpaper.ie)



website [www.pensionsboard.ie](http://www.pensionsboard.ie) had 600,000 visits in 2009 - an increase of 20% on 2008. During the height of the campaign in October, the website had 80,000 visits compared with 50,000 in 2008.

During the year, a number of measures were introduced to support the Irish pension system and defined benefit schemes in particular. In that regard, the Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2009 provided for the following:

- Pensions Insolvency Payment Scheme, the purpose of which is to give a better return to those defined benefit pension funds in deficit where the employer has also become insolvent. It will operate on a pilot basis for 3 years (from 1 February 2010) following which it will be reviewed.
- Amending the rules in relation to the distribution of assets on wind-up of a defined benefit scheme in order to provide for a more equitable distribution between those members who are retired and those who have yet to retire.
- Increasing the flexibility of a scheme restructuring by broadening the range of items that can be altered.
- Strengthening the role of the Pensions Board in relation to the prosecution of employers who fail in their obligation to submit their employee's pension contributions to the trustees of a pension scheme.
- Granting additional power to the Court in order to protect trustees who have acted honestly and reasonably in the performance of their duties.

### **Incentive to older people to remain in the workforce**

An earnings disregard of €200 per week for the State Pension (Non-Contributory) acts as an incentive for older people to remain in the workforce.

Issues surrounding retirement/State Pension age and retaining older people in the workforce were discussed in the Green Paper on Pensions and the subsequent consultation process. Plans for the future in this regard were developed in the National Pension's Framework.

## **Service Delivery**

The Department is engaged in an ongoing programme of continuous improvement aimed at streamlining business processes, procedures and work practices. Investments in modernisation programmes support the delivery of a high quality service to customers in a more efficient, flexible and integrated way.

The State Pensions area has continued to progress the service delivery modernisation programme and the transition to paperless claim processing. This, along with the associated organisational change and improved structures saw 90% of State Pension (Transition) claims being processed in 6 weeks and 90% of State Pension (Contributory) claims processed by date of entitlement. During the year, new initiatives which support increased productivity and a faster response to customers included:

- Replacement of Personalised Payable Orders books with electronic payments for all customers.
- All state pension and household benefit forms are now scanned and processed to decision ready stage using data extraction technology minimising delays for customers.
- New online facility available to request a statement of pensions received which enables people to communicate with the Department at a time that best suits them.
- Improved 'continuing eligibility' certification process with scanning and automatic processing of certificates which minimises the administrative burden on customers and protects people from becoming overpaid.
- Extension of the state pension initiation process for those approaching pension age to support a new online state pension and household benefits application facility which enables people to access services at a time and place that best suits their needs.
- Processing times reduced for customers and productivity gains achieved through "once and done" transaction processing where claims are decided on first review.



## **Goal 4 - PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES**

***To provide income and other supports to people with disabilities and to facilitate them in taking up employment, training, education or development opportunities***

### **Context**

During 2009, some 168,000 people were in receipt of weekly disability-related payments, with a further 17,400 qualified adults and over 42,000 child dependants benefiting from these payments. Expenditure on these weekly payments amounted to almost €1.93 bn. This represents an increase in expenditure of nearly 5% over 2008, reflecting both the increases in the weekly rates payable and an increase of 4% in the numbers in receipt of Disability Allowance.

Support for people with disabilities is provided through invalidity pension, disablement benefit, blind pension, disability allowance, domiciliary care allowance, occupational injuries benefit, and respite care grants.

### **2009 Budgetary Measures**

- The personal rate of all working age payments for people with disabilities was increased by €6.50 per week. This brought the rate of invalidity pension (under age 65) to €209.80 per week, and the rate of disability allowance to €204.30 per week thereby fulfilling the Government commitment to maintain the value of the disability allowance payment.
- Increase of €4.30 to the qualified adult increase for disability allowance, bringing the weekly rate to €135.60.
- Increase of €4.60 to the qualified adult increase (aged under 66) for invalidity pension, bringing the weekly rate to €149.70.

### **Policy Developments**

#### **Disability Sectoral Plan**

The review of the Department's Disability Sectoral Plan 2006-2009 and the achievements under each objective was completed and forwarded to the Department of Justice, Equality & Law Reform, the co-ordinating body, in November 2009, to be laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas, as required under the provisions of the Disability Act 2005. A new sectoral plan in respect of the period 2010-2012 was drafted during this process and will be subject to a separate legislative process in the Houses of the Oireachtas before it can be published. In informing both the review and the preparation of the draft Sectoral Plan 2010-2012, a comprehensive consultation process was undertaken with a wide spectrum of interests including customers and staff, disability stakeholders and service providers, and the general public.

A Carer's Allowance customer survey was issued in December 2009 as recommended under the Disability Sectoral Plan. The results of this survey will be collated and analysed during 2010.

#### **Employment of people with disabilities**

In January 2008, the Department obtained approval under the European Social Fund, Human Capital Investment Operational Programme 2007-2013 for a cross agency programme to develop and assess new approaches to promoting participation in the economy on the part of people with disabilities. The high level objective of this inter agency project is to develop and test a comprehensive employment

strategy based on individual case management of people on illness/disability welfare payments that will have the capacity to increase their rate of employment. It is envisaged that the strategy, when developed and tested, will form the basis of a working model for activation of people on illness/disability welfare payments which can be rolled out on a countrywide basis.

Over the last two years, some 680 people on illness-related payments were invited to attend for interview and, of these, 332 people have met project staff on a one-to-one basis to complete personal progression plans. Also in that time, 11 training programmes, targeted specifically at people on illness/disability payments, were held and a total of 128 people took part in the programmes.

A 'Disability Open Day' was held in Athlone in September 2009. The purpose of the open day was to bring together service providers and service users to improve networking between providers, and provide an opportunity for service users to obtain information on the various supports available to them and/or their families. Some 1,700 recipients of illness and disability payments in the Athlone area were contacted by letter to advise them of the open day.

### **Partial Capacity**

Work on draft proposals for a partial capacity scheme commenced in 2009. The structure of welfare provision in Ireland for people with illnesses or disabilities reflects a view that people can be categorised as being either capable of full-time work or incapable of full-time work. Such a strict binary approach fails to capture the reality that people with a disability may have the capacity to engage in the open labour market. The 2008 OECD report on "Sickness, Disability and Work: breaking the Barriers", which examined the structures of welfare provision for people with disabilities in Ireland and in a number of other OECD countries, noted that the focus within welfare systems on incapacity rather than capacity carries negative consequences at a personal level for people with disabilities and their families. Legislative proposals to provide for a partial capacity scheme which will seek to address these issues are being prepared with a view to enactment in 2010.

## **Service Delivery**

### **Transfer of income support schemes**

The Domiciliary Care Allowance scheme was transferred to the Department from the Health Service Executive (HSE) for new claims from April 2009, and for existing customers from September 2009. There are approximately 25,000 recipients of Domiciliary Care Allowance.

The Department, in consultation with the Department of Health and Children, is currently considering the timescale for the transfer of Blind Welfare Allowance (approx 3,000 recipients) and the arrangements in relation to Mobility Allowance are also under consideration. There are currently no recipients of the Infectious Diseases Maintenance Allowance, which is being discontinued.

### **Medical Review and Assessment Service (MRAS)**

Following a fundamental review of the Medical Review and Assessment Service undertaken in 2005-2006, a Medical Referral and Case Management project was initiated in January 2009 with the aim of implementing many of the recommendations identified in the review. Building on the Department's integrated service delivery platform the project will support referral and electronic scheduling of assessments and record the outcome of medical assessments. New evidence based medical protocols have also been developed for use in the online recording and these will be rolled out in 2010. The new case management functionality will also have a broader use across the Department in areas where individual case management of customers is a requirement.

Progress has also been made on a number of other recommendations contained in the review report primarily relating to the number of Medical Assessors and their location. Nine new Medical Assessors have been recruited over the period October 2007 to January 2009 to fill existing vacancies and a

further four are in the process of being recruited. This will increase the Medical Assessor cadre to 27, of whom 12 will be based in regional centres.

The number of medical assessment centres, currently 51, is kept under continuous review with the aim of providing good quality accessible accommodation to meet the needs of our customers. To date, seven centres have been closed while 2 new centres were opened in 2009 (Athlone and Buncrana).

### **Review of Disability Allowance**

Completion of this review was deferred pending the publication by the Central Statistics Office of the second round of results of the 2006 National Disability Survey. As this had been repeatedly deferred, two extensive surveys of Disability Allowance claims were undertaken instead, the first looking at a sample drawn at random from the scheme claim load and the second focusing specifically on those in receipt of Disability Allowance and engaged in employment. The report will be published in 2010.

## **Goal 5 - POVERTY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION**

**To attain better outcomes in tackling poverty and achieve a more inclusive society through the provision of income and other support services and co-ordinating implementation of Government strategies for social inclusion**

The Department's Social Inclusion Division<sup>17</sup> has overall responsibility for developing, co-ordinating and driving Ireland's National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016 (NAPInclusion), the social inclusion elements of the National Social Partnership Agreement Towards 2016, and the National Development Plan 2007-2013. The division works closely with all relevant Government departments and agencies in this regard.

### **Annual Social Inclusion Report 2008**

The NAPInclusion 2007-2016 prioritises 12 high level goals reflecting the lifecycle approach in relation to children, people of working age, older people and people with disabilities. It identifies some 150 targets across all policy areas, which are at the core of the strategic approach, aimed at making a decisive impact on poverty and building a more inclusive society. The overall goal of the action plan is to progressively reduce the numbers of people experiencing consistent poverty to between 2% and 4% by 2012 and to eliminate consistent poverty by 2016.

The 2008 Annual Social Inclusion Report<sup>18</sup> was published in November 2009 and showed that, in 2008, the overall percentage of people in poverty was down to 4.2% from 5.1% the previous year.

### **Integration of Combat Poverty Agency and Office for Social Inclusion**

On 1 July 2009, the Combat Poverty Agency and the Office for Social Inclusion were integrated to form a new Social Inclusion Division within the Department. The new division provides a unified institutional structure to support government, officials and the wider community in addressing issues of poverty and social exclusion, and supports the institutional structures which underpin the NAPInclusion.

### **Annual Social Inclusion Forum**

The 2009 Social Inclusion Forum was held in November and attended by over 200 participants from the voluntary and community sector, the statutory sector, local representatives, and members of the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF). The discussions were linked to the key themes of the Irish National Programme for the 2010 European Year for Combating Poverty & Social Exclusion; child poverty, access to work and learning opportunities, access to services for older people and people with disabilities.

A report on the forum will be submitted to the Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion, Children and Integration in early 2010.

### **Poverty Impact Assessment**

Poverty Impact Assessment is the process by which Government Departments, Local Authorities and State Agencies assess policies and programmes at design, implementation and review stages in relation to the likely impact that they will have on poverty and on the inequalities which are likely to lead to

---

<sup>17</sup> In April 2010 the Government reassigned responsibility for the Social Inclusion Division to the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs.

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.welfare.ie/EN/Policy/PolicyPublications/SocialInclusion/Pages/socialinclusionar2008.aspx>

poverty, with a view to poverty reduction. The responsibility to undertake an assessment falls to the relevant Government Department that is developing a particular policy or programme.

The Social Inclusion Division has developed guidelines on the process and provides assistance to Government departments on their implementation.

### **Research, Poverty Measurement and Data**

Evidence-based research on the changing nature, extent and causes of poverty is a vital element in the fight against poverty and social exclusion. The NAPinclusion states that the Government will work to ensure that research which it commissions and supports is effectively aligned with the priorities in the plan. The following reports were published in 2009:

- The *Poverty and Deprivation in Ireland in Comparative Perspective*, which was funded under the Department's research programme with the ESRI.
- The third report in the series of social portraits of different lifecycle groups or communities. This report has a particular focus on areas of urban and rural disadvantage, migrants and ethnic groups, Travellers and the homeless.
- "Analysis and measurement of poverty and deprivation in Ireland based on the 'Consistent poverty' measure" was published by the ERSI and is the first of three such reports commissioned as part of a three-year contract with Social Inclusion Division.

### **Rent and Mortgage Interest Supplement**

Provisions included in the qualifying criteria for rent supplement are aimed at supporting the transfer of rent supplement tenants, who wish to take up full-time employment, to the rental accommodation scheme (RAS) of the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. In 2009 the minimum contribution which rent supplement tenants are required to pay was increased to align it with the contribution payable under RAS and other social housing. This is to encourage more people to move to RAS and facilitate engagement in employment.

RAS gives local authorities specific responsibility for meeting the longer term housing needs of people receiving rent supplement for 18 months or more. Almost 25,000 transfers from rent supplement have occurred since 2005 and approximately 7,000 of these occurred in 2009. Local authorities have transferred approx 13,500 rent supplement cases to RAS while housing authorities have transferred a further 11,500 recipients to other social housing options.

In addition, entry to RAS was restricted to applicants who have been existing tenants for six months or to those who are placed on local authority housing lists after a full housing assessment. The maximum rent limits were reduced, where appropriate, by up to 10% for all new tenancies/renewals and all existing rent supplements were reduced by 8%.

### **Equality Review of the Social Welfare Code**

The Department is carrying out a technical review of the entire social welfare code to examine its compatibility with the Equal Status Act 2000 (as amended). The consultant's report was submitted in June 2009 and the findings are being examined by the Department. The review will contribute to informed planning and policy making to ensure that the social welfare system reflects the needs and expectations of all citizens and is equitable in meeting those needs. It is expected to be completed in 2010.

### **EU Social Security Policies**

On 16 September 2009, Regulations 987/09 and 988/09 were signed by the European Parliament and the Council and were published on 30 October in the Official Journal of the European Union. These regulations simplify the rules and procedures of the long-standing co-ordination system and reflect recent jurisprudence and will apply from 1 May 2010.

A key provision of this EU-wide programme of modernisation is to replace the current, predominantly paper-based exchanges on social security information with electronic data exchange across all member States. A project to develop a system that will support the electronic exchange of information and an examination of data required to underpin the new service commenced in 2009.

### **Bilateral Social Security Agreements**

A bilateral agreement on social security with Japan was signed in October 2009. The agreement will come into force after certain parliamentary procedures are finalised on both sides. The agreement will facilitate the development of business interests in both countries and enhances protection for contributory pensions for people who have worked in both countries and allows workers who are working on a temporary posting to remain covered by their home country legislation for up to 5 years.

### **North/South developments**

In October 2009, the Joint Secretariat facilitated a meeting with the authorities from both sides of the border to deal with issues in relation to social welfare entitlements, with particular reference to the impact of EU regulations on those regarded as frontier workers.

## **GOAL 6 - IDENTITY MANAGEMENT AND SECURE ACCESS TO SERVICES**

***To establish and authenticate customer identity for public services and to support the development and deployment of a public service-wide identity policy framework***

### **Introduction**

The development of Ireland's eGovernment strategy envisages an expansion of services to the customer and an improvement in the manner in which these services are provided. In this context a coherent identity management policy is essential to ensure that individuals can access services across multiple channels (e.g., front desk, online, phone) in a consistent way with a minimum of duplication and effort while preserving their privacy to the maximum extent possible.

### **Service Delivery**

#### **Develop a revised registration service to establish customer identity**

The first project in a programme of projects to deliver an enhanced customer registration service was completed during the year. This project had a significant technical focus and delivered an IT architectural framework upon which the registration services will be built and provides a dedicated customer database for the new computer application.

#### **Personal Public Service Number**

The Personal Public Service (PPS) number is a unique personal reference number that helps customers to apply for benefits and to access information and public services quickly and easily. This includes services such as social welfare, Revenue, public healthcare and education. The use of the PPS number allows public services to be more customer centred with less red tape and it provides the foundation for fast and secure access to the full range of public services, reduced form filling and better service delivery. The Department provides identity management services to public service agencies, facilitating the wider use of the PPS number in the delivery of public services, the development of eGovernment services and enhancing systems for control of fraud and abuse.

Personal Public Service (PPS) numbers are issued following a controlled allocation procedure, involving personal attendance at an office, the completion of a written application form, the submission of appropriate identity documents and the proving of identity. Currently, all holders of a PPS number are registered to Standard Authentication Framework Environment (SAFE) Level 1. Standard Authentication Framework Environment (SAFE) Level 2 provides for a higher level of authentication involving the addition of a verified photograph and signature. Children born in Ireland are automatically registered to SAFE Level 1 through registration by the General Register Office and a PPS number allocated. In other cases application must be made in person at one of the Department's network of Local Offices. A total of 165,895 PPS numbers were allocated in 2009.

In conjunction with the development of a new registration process, a programme has been underway to rationalise the number of offices where SAFE registrations can take place. The plan envisages one registration centre per county boundary except in the case of Cork and Tipperary where two were considered necessary.

By the end of 2009, registration centres for all but three counties, Mayo, Roscommon and Westmeath, were established and it is expected to complete the rationalisation by the end of 2010. This will result in the concentration of experience and expertise in identity registration and associated skills such as document examination.

The Department's Client Identity Services has a central role in developing and maintaining expertise in the area of questioned document examination. Links have been fostered and developed with other social security agencies, embassies, immigration agencies and national and international experts to ensure that they can check the validity of documents presented. This expertise is passed on to front-line registration staff, through the provision of appropriate guidelines and training and the provision of a centralised help desk service allowing registration offices to check the veracity of suspect documents.

### **Provision of identity management services to external agencies**

The key roles of the Department in this regard are to:

- Provide identity management services to external agencies thus facilitating the wider use of the PPS number in the delivery of public services.
- Identifying and implementing data clean up projects to enhance the development of integrated services.
- Liaise with all Departmental and external projects that interact with or have a validation requirement from Client Identity Services.

In addition to an automated matching and client identity validation service, during the year the Department provided assistance to other agencies in some 77,000 cases where issues arose and a manual intervention was required.

### **Public Services Cards**

In conjunction with a number of other Government Departments, the Department has developed specifications for a Public Services Card (PSC) under the Standard Authentication Framework Environment (SAFE) programme. The specification provides for identification features including a photograph. The card is to act as a key for accessing public services and identifying and helping to authenticate individuals.

Following a public procurement exercise, a contract was signed at the end of 2009 for a complete managed service for the production, maintenance and distribution of the card.

### **Review and enhance security systems**

The Department is engaged in a multi-annual programme of work, which continued during the year, to progressively implement a new Information Security Architecture and thereby reduce the risk of the loss of confidentiality, availability or integrity of information or information systems.

### **Protect your information**

The Department is committed to protecting the rights and privacy of individuals in accordance with the Data Protection Acts 1998 and 2003 and has a Data Protection Policy in place which is approved and monitored by the Secretary General. As part of its work, the Department may need to store or use certain personal data about customers in order to carry out its day-to-day work and meet its legal obligations. Any breach of trust with regard to the confidentiality of information is treated as serious misconduct under the Disciplinary Code and comes under immediate consideration for dismissal. Staff are reminded by circular and by notices on the corporate portal of their obligations under both the Official Secrets Act and the Data Protection Act.

During the year, 17 complaints of alleged breaches of the Data Protection Acts involving the disclosure of confidential customer information were received in the Department. Following investigation, no evidence of a breach was established in respect of 14 cases, while two cases are still under investigation. A report on the outcome of the investigation of the remaining case has been referred to the Department's Personnel Division for consideration regarding possible disciplinary action under the Civil Service Disciplinary Code.



A further 6 cases of suspected breaches of procedures and possible fraud were investigated by the Department's Internal Control Support Unit. Of these, 3 cases were found to be in order, 2 were referred to the Department's Personnel Division for consideration and 1 case is still ongoing.

In the case referred to Personnel in 2009 for alleged breach of the Data Protection Acts, the staff member was warned as to their future conduct. In the two other cases referred to Personnel, one was for a breach of procedure and fraud and the staff member involved was dismissed. In the second case, the staff member was deemed to have inappropriately accessed material on the internet contrary to Department guidelines and they subsequently retired.

In addition, a couple of cases from previous years were finalised in 2009. One officer retired following a breach of the Data Protection Acts (cost neutral retirement). The second case related to a breach of internal procedures and resulted in the officer having an increment deducted for one year.

## **GOAL 7 - OPERATIONAL CAPABILITIES AND MODERNISATION**

*To develop further an effective, adaptable and capable organisation and a culture of excellence*

### **Context**

The Department is engaged in an ongoing programme of continuous improvement to enable us to work better, provide an improved customer service and maximise the capabilities of our staff. This involves the redesign of office systems, business processes, procedures and work practices and the introduction of new technology solutions. This will help us respond to changes in our customers' needs, provide ease of access through the various contact channels at a time and place that best suits customers' needs, and improve productivity in the administration of welfare schemes and services. These initiatives will also enhance our systems for control of fraud and abuse and improve our management and reporting capabilities.

### **Policy Developments**

#### **Effective Policy Development**

Policy development in the Department is carried out in a number of ways including internal analysis, working groups and committees, inter-Departmental working groups, and consultation with stakeholders including other Government Departments and agencies, the social partners, and the public.

Consultation with stakeholders is a key element of the policy making process in the Department. When seeking views on the impact of current policy or the potential impacts of policy change, the Department has demonstrated its ongoing commitment to consult with those affected. This is facilitated through various means including the annual pre- and post-Budget fora, through calls for submissions and through ongoing engagement with various customer representative groups.

Regulatory Impact Analysis (RIA) also requires the Department to consult with relevant stakeholders in advance of introducing primary legislation and significant statutory instruments.

The Department's Policy Committee, chaired by the Secretary General, met seven times during 2009. The Assistant Principal Policy Group met three times.

#### **Value for Money and Policy Review Programme**

The Value for Money (VFM) and Policy Review Initiative provides a basis for a systematic analysis of what is being achieved by expenditure in each programme area. During 2009, work on the review of the provision of information was finalised and work on the review of disability allowance continued. A review of child income support commenced during the year.

The recommendations made in completed expenditure/VFM reviews are monitored on an ongoing basis by the Department's Policy Committee. Progress on ongoing expenditure/VFM reviews, on implementation of recommendations from completed reviews and on the impacts achieved as a result of reviews are set out in Appendix 6.

#### **Customer Consultation Framework**

The Department provides a wide range of supports and services to a large and diverse customer base. As part of the Department's customer consultation framework we seek participation from customers to assist in developing policies and service delivery mechanisms. This is achieved through surveys and

customer panels, as well as meetings with customer representative groups and those engaged in welfare information services.

The Department's Disability Consultative Forum meets quarterly to update and get feedback from representatives of people with disabilities on relevant issues. Organisations represented at the forum include the Disability Federation of Ireland, People with Disabilities Ireland, Inclusion Ireland, the Brothers of Charity, the Irish Wheelchair Association, the Not for Profit Business Association, the National Disability Authority and the Citizens Information Board.

A survey of invalidity pension recipients was carried out in early 2009 and a report was provided to the Disability Consultative Forum in June 2009. A total of 1,000 invalidity pension recipients were invited to take part and 552 customers responded. Of these, over 90% of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied in their dealings with the Department.

A customer panel of people in receipt of Disability Allowance was arranged to discuss matters of interest including the switch to electronic payments and customer services, in particular electronic services available on the Department's website. Consultation also took place with a broad range of customer representative groups. Matters discussed included the money advice and budgeting service, mortgage interest supplement and changes which had taken place in relation to the appointment of agents to collect social welfare payments for customers.

In addition, submissions are sought from the public from time to time on particular initiatives, for example, the Pensions Green Paper and the development of the new Customer Charter and Customer Action Plan. We value customers' views and will continue to consult with them to get feedback on the quality of services we deliver and increase people's awareness of the Department and its work.

### **Customer Action Plan and Customer Charter**

Following an extensive consultation process with customers, customer representatives, staff and stakeholders, the new Customer Charter and Customer Action Plan 2009 – 2011<sup>19</sup> was launched in May 2009. This customer action plan builds on the achievements of previous plans and sets out the commitments by the Department to develop and enhance services over the coming years. It outlines the aims and actions being undertaken in respect of each customer contact channel.

Delivering a quality information service is a key part of the Customer Action Plan. The primary objective of the Department's information policy is to ensure that all citizens are made aware of the wide range of schemes and services available and that they are kept informed of changes and improvements as they occur through the [www.welfare.ie](http://www.welfare.ie) website, providing a LoCall information line (1890 66 22 44), providing targeted presentations to groups such as those about to retire, through the distribution of information leaflets and booklets, and advertising in national and provincial media. Funding of over €580,000 was provided to national organisations and voluntary groups for the dissemination of social welfare information to meet the needs of the unemployed, people with disabilities, emigrants and immigrants.

### **Human Resources (HR) Strategy 2009-2011**

Published internally at the start of the year, the new *Human Resources Strategy 2009–2011* brings together the Department's HR policies and integrates them within the overall organisational strategy. This places human resource management at the centre of the Department's decision making processes.

### **Performance Management System**

The Performance Management and Development System (PMDS), is now fully integrated with the increment, promotion and assignments to higher scale human resource processes, and is a key tool for managers and staff in meeting these objectives.

---

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.welfare.ie/EN/Policy/CorporatePublications/HowWeWork/Pages/CustAct20092011.aspx>

## Developing a learning organisation

The Department's *Learning and Development Strategy 2009-2011* was launched during the year and has an emphasis on addressing training needs on an organisational, divisional and sectional level. A key strategic objective is the development of a collaborative approach to learning and development through a combination of blended training interventions, on-the-job training and self-managed learning. Formal management development training, covering SO to HEO, has been redesigned and is being implemented in a phased way with existing training.

## Key Staff Development Programmes

During 2009 the Department acquired 441 new staff and there were 684 internal moves. This resulted in a high level of demand for training across the organisation. In particular, an increased focus was put on training and supports for managers and staff in Local Offices. This included training to some 80 regional staff on habitual residence conditionality which supported the localisation of this decision making function.

Targeted training and awareness programmes continued during the year under the Disability Sectoral Plan; under the decentralisation programme; in building capacity in new technology products for information services staff; and in customer service training. In addition, the Department's staff development unit (SDU) contributed to the organisational change project to integrate the Combat Poverty Agency and supported the rollout of a new Time and Attendance system. Pre-retirement courses were organised and coordinated for the increased numbers of staff retiring, and continued training was provided for designated persons in accordance with the National Guidelines for the Protection of Children. Key training was also provided for the implementation of SOLAS, the Department's new corporate portal.

A number of courses in Safe Pass Training were delivered to 40 Social Welfare Inspectors in 2009. This course provides health and safety training for Social Welfare Inspectors who undertake building site inspections during the course of their work.

The Department's staff development unit (SDU) provided a total of 377 courses during 2009 for 3,516 participants. The total amount spent on staff training and development in 2009 was over €9.9m which represented some 4.3% of total payroll costs. Training courses are systematically evaluated to assess their effectiveness and to ensure value for money. During 2009 some 90% of training courses were evaluated on the day of delivery to assess the effectiveness of the course and its presenter. More in-depth evaluation was carried out on some 30% of courses to assess the application of learning and improvements in the workplace as a result of the training. In-depth *Return on Investment* (ROI) evaluations were completed in late 2009 on two SDU training programmes delivered during 2007 and 2008. These evaluations concluded that the ROI benefits<sup>20</sup> of the two programmes were 45% in one case and 177% in the second.

In April 2009, the Department's staff development unit (SDU) was awarded an Outstanding Achievement Award at the Irish Institute of Training and Development (IITD) Awards. The unit also retained the Excellence Through People (ETP) Gold Accreditation and were awarded the Excellence Ireland Quality Association (EIQA) Qmark<sup>21</sup>.

## Fiúntas

The Department's Fiúntas scheme is an exceptional performance award scheme designed to increase staff motivation, to recognise exceptional performance, to encourage fresh input and to foster a climate

---

<sup>20</sup> ROI measures focus on an assessment of the benefits of specific learning and training interventions compared with the costs incurred. (Jack Phillips Level 5 ROI model).

<sup>21</sup> <http://eiqa.com/>

of change. In 2009, a total of 47 awards were made to 25 individuals and 22 teams across a wide range of areas of the Department.

### **Health Promotion**

Throughout the year the Department actively promoted health awareness and provided access to information leaflets and booklets on a wide range of health and welfare issues. In addition, the Department also supported external health promotion activities by publicising information regarding Daffodil Day, the Irish Heart Foundation, the Get Ireland Active Campaign and influenza A (H1N1). The process for selecting a company to provide health screening for staff was completed and this service was offered to all staff early in 2010.

### **Staff Disability Awareness**

The Department's disability sectoral plan, in line with the provisions of Part 5 of the Disability Act 2005, includes a range of commitments aimed at meeting the needs of staff members with disabilities. During the year initiatives included:

- Providing work experience under the Willing, Able and Mentoring Programme;
- Continuing to provide a needs assessment process in which supports for staff with disabilities are identified and provided;
- Providing a dedicated section of the HR intranet site for employees with a disability, with easily accessible information on the supports available within the Department and from external support organisations;
- The circulation of information to staff regarding supports available and the responsibility of managers in supporting staff with a disability.

The Partnership Steering Committee set up in 2008 to examine career progression for staff with a disability and related issues completed its report in 2009. This report will be used to guide future actions in the Department's new disability sectoral plan.

### **Anti Harassment, Sexual Harassment and Bullying Policy**

The Department is committed to creating and maintaining a positive working environment for all its employees and fully supports and adheres to the Anti Harassment, Sexual Harassment and Bullying Policy for the Civil Service. During 2009, the Department:

- Reviewed the operation of its Contact Persons Support Service under the Positive Working Environment Policy, which included additional training for contact persons.
- Circulated information to all staff regarding developments in the Contact Persons Support Service and publicised the positive working environment section of the HR intranet site with the relevant contact information for the service.
- Updated and maintained a dedicated information section on bullying and harassment on the HR intranet site.
- Continued to provide positive working environment awareness talks for managers and supervisors on all relevant departmental training courses.

The Personnel Section of the Department continues to provide a supportive role for local management regarding advice on procedures for responding to complaints or allegations, which include informal discussions and mediation.

### **Employee Assistance Service**

The Employee Assistance Service (EAS) is an important element in the Department's support for its employees and in discharging its duty of care under the Safety, Health and Welfare Act 2005. The EAS provides a confidential advice, support, and information and referral service for employees with personal and/or work related difficulties. It also proactively promotes health and welfare through the provision of information, by contributing to all relevant training courses in the Department and by promotional visits to Departmental offices.

## **Service Delivery**

### **Local Office Process Modernisation**

In response to unprecedented volumes of unemployment claims, new procedures have been introduced to improve the claim acceptance and decisions process in the Department's network of local offices and branch offices. These include a new appointment system in 33 local offices which will be extended to other offices; self certification for employees with casual work arrangements; and the provision of on-line services for jobseekers on [www.welfare.ie](http://www.welfare.ie). Since May 2008, some 400 extra staff have also been assigned to local offices, to new central support units and to the Department's Inspectorate.

A review of customer facing services was completed in April 2009 which formulates a plan for the operation of enhanced customer facing services in the future which takes account of the ongoing business and information technology developments that impact on service delivery. A number of initiatives have already come out of the review as well as a generic local office design template and a new external signage design specification will be used by local and branch offices. The new technology solutions will utilise and extend functionality in our integrated service delivery platform to provide new channels of communication and certification for customers.

### **Process Improvement**

A business process improvement (BPI) culture is well embedded in the Department with a strong focus on improving customer service. As well as the initiatives undertaken in the Department's network of local offices and branch offices and in our headquarters offices in Sligo, including the transition to paperless claim processing and the associated organisational change completed for the State Pension claim processing area, a business process improvement programme was successfully undertaken in Invalidity Pension section in our Longford offices.

The recommendations of the strategic review of the Department's Client Eligibility Services (CES) were implemented over the course of 2009 in line with the decentralisation of the section to Buncrana, Co. Donegal. Key achievements during the year included a radical restructuring of the section along 'value stream' lines with the consequent streamlining of functions. A notable initiative was the introduction of a customer service framework which channelled some 32,000 phone queries into a new customer service team established under the review.

### **Service Delivery Modernisation**

#### **Integrated Service Delivery Platform**

The Department is engaged in an ongoing programme of service delivery modernisation to enable us to maximise productivity and provide a quality customer service. Utilising integrated technology solutions provides a more responsive and efficient service for customers through automated and "once and done" claim processing, scanning of applications, and provision of online facilities. The Department's integrated service delivery platform, the Business Object Model Implementation (BOMi), was further extended in 2009 to cater for implementation of the compensatory payment scheme to compensate the parents of certain recipients of child benefit for a reduction in payments made in respect of 18 year olds. Other developments included the integration of the Domiciliary Care Allowance, Respite Care Grant scheme, the National Fuel scheme, and other supports for Local Offices.

A significant project was also completed during the year to integrate the Widow(er)'s Contributory Pension scheme onto the Business Object Model (BOMi) platform. At the same time a *Lean* continuous improvement programme was undertaken which resulted in the implementation of new processes and structures within the widow's pension section which provided efficiencies and improved services to our customers.

We will continue to extend and integrate our delivery support systems and work began during the year on the migration of a number of further schemes to the BOMi including Invalidity Pension, State Pension (Non Contributory), Disability Allowance and Carer's Allowance.

#### Online Services

The Department's website is now recognised by staff, third party information providers and customers as the location of the most up to date information on the Department's schemes and services and won the 2009 Irish eGovernment award for "*Most Accessible Government Website*".

The range of jobseeker-related information on the website was extended during 2009 to include downloadable application forms, a *Frequently Asked Questions* area, the creation of dedicated Local Office pages which include maps, as well as an online "sign-off" facility now in use in more than forty Local Offices and being extended nationwide.

An online statement request service was introduced in February 2009, as well as an online facility for requesting copies of social insurance records in March 2009. Online claiming for State Pension Contributory and Household Benefits was introduced in March 2009 and extended to include Widow(er)'s Contributory Pension in December 2009.

#### Telephone Services

The Department has upgraded its telephony infrastructure to enhance supports for voice and data traffic along with the provision of LoCall numbers for each of the Department's headquarters buildings. New telephony management software has now been installed in a number of business areas such as Information Services and State Pension areas (Sligo), Illness Benefits Section (Dublin), Client Eligibility Services (Buncrana and Waterford) and Client Identity Services (Carrick-on-Shannon).

#### Short Message Service (text messaging)

The SMS (text messaging) service was further extended and customers can now request statements of the amount of benefit/pension paid to them, as well as application forms for schemes and services, by texting details to 51909.

#### **Office Systems Modernisation**

The Department is implementing an extensive office systems modernisation programme to support communication and collaboration enabling us to work better, to maximise the performance of our staff, and to improve our management and reporting capabilities. A key component of this programme is the design and development of a strategic corporate portal. The project began in 2008 and the new corporate portal, named SOLAS, was made available in 2009.

SOLAS provides staff with a single, easy way of accessing all the information, systems and tools they need to carry out their work. It allows them to find the information they need quickly and easily, to access systems they use from a single location, to create and manage documents and communicate and collaborate with others.

Future phases of the project will see additional features and functionality being added to SOLAS. This project, in conjunction with the infrastructure project undertaken by the Information Systems Division, will see all Department staff migrate from the old office systems environment, *All-in-One/Office Server*, to a new office platform. Some 800 staff have already migrated to the new platform and it is planned to migrate a further 2,000 staff in 2010.

A new automated travel and subsistence system went live across the Department in March 2009 with paper claims ceasing from 31 March 2009. Since its implementation, postage costs have been almost entirely eliminated, accuracy has increased, processing times have been reduced and the process is more economic and efficient. By December 2009, 99% of travel & subsistence claims were paid electronically.



## **Review of Organisational Structures**

Work continued in 2009 on an organisational review of the Department with an emphasis on enhancing structures to support changing business requirements, the significant increase in work volumes and the retirement of staff with a certain loss of corporate knowledge. The work progressed well, with significant engagement with the Management Board on the business and role of the Department in the current changing economic and social climate and on the vision for the future, and will be built on in the coming year.

## **Corporate Data Strategy**

The Corporate Information Strategy was published in July 2009<sup>22</sup>. The main focus of the strategy is on getting more value from the Department's structured data and where necessary to get data into databases where it can be analysed for operational and policy purposes. The strategy also outlines the main strategic actions needed to progress the objectives.

## **Corporate Governance**

During the year, the Department carried out a review of the effectiveness of its risk management programme and tools. A number of potential enhancements were identified and these will be progressed through 2010.

The Department's Internal Audit Unit continued to play a key part in the governance structure. It carried out internal audits over a wide ambit, covering local offices and branch offices; programme administration; finance and accounts and outsourced ICT audits. Any recommendations arising from audits were implemented where possible. The Audit Committee, chaired by an external member, oversaw the work of the Internal Audit Unit and provided guidance and advice in relation to business control and governance issues.

## **Project Governance**

The Department has a robust project governance process in place which is overseen by a Project Governance Committee (PGC) comprised of members of the Management Board. The PGC approves and prioritises projects and ensures appropriate procurement procedures are followed and there is transparency and accountability. Further to Directive 2007/66/EC, the Department has enhanced the letters issued to unsuccessful bidders to include detailed feedback and observes a standstill period of 16 days before awarding a contract. In accordance with the provisions of Department of Finance Circular 02/09, the Department seeks Department of Finance approval for ICT expenditure, advertises ICT procurements in excess of €10,000 on eTenders<sup>23</sup>, and uses central, shared or managed services and procurement toolkits or frameworks.

## **Financial Management and Reporting Systems**

The first release of the new Payment and Agency Reconciliation Platform (PARP) went live in June 2009. The PARP system provides an integrated reconciliation solution to reconcile all the Department's payment instruments and associated agency accounts and integrates with the Department's financial and payment generating systems. A subsequent release in December 2009 provides enhanced financial reporting and customer identity supports.

During 2009, under the Prompt Payment legislation, interest was paid on 77 payments which amounted to 0.18% of payments. The prompt payment interest amounted to approximately €7,000.

## **Accommodation and Decentralisation**

The building project was completed to accommodate 87 posts transferred from Dublin and Letterkenny to the Department's new offices in Buncrana, Co. Donegal under the programme of decentralisation.

---

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.welfare.ie/EN/Policy/CorporatePublications/HowWeWork/Pages/corpinfostrat.aspx>

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.etenders.gov.ie/>



The business units involved were Client Eligibility Services, which deals with customer social insurance records, and Maternity Benefits. The decentralisation project involved a 100% turnover in staff and was completed successfully with minimal impact on customer service. Staff in the Buncrana local office were also relocated to the new complex.

A new local office was opened in King's Inn Street, Dublin to replace the office in North Cumberland Street. This new office also now provides the PPS number (PPSN) allocation function in Dublin following the amalgamation of the 4 Dublin PPSN centres. Local offices in Dun Laoghaire, Cork, Belmullet, Limerick, Ballyfermot, Longford and Letterkenny underwent refurbishment.

### **Providing Services in Irish**

In line with the requirements under the Official Languages Act 2003, services in Irish continued to be provided by the staff of the Department during the year. An Irish version of the Department's website is available online<sup>24</sup> and all primary forms and leaflets are available in Irish<sup>25</sup>. A project to update the capacity of older customer service support systems, and the relevant messaging infrastructure to manage richer text required to support Irish, commenced during the year and will be completed in 2010.

Regulations under the Official Languages Act relating to stationery came into effect on 1 March and arrangements were put in place to implement the regulations.

### **Providing Services in other Languages**

The Department provides assistance to people for whom English is not their first language, or who require a sign-language interpreter. This includes a document translation service and interpreters or sign-language services in local offices/branch offices to assist with customer communication. The interpretation service is a three-way phone system involving the customer, a member of staff and an external interpreter and is available in 65 Local Offices and Branch Offices. In 2009, over 2,300 documents were translated, including some 340 Irish documents. In addition, 13 sign language interpretations were provided and 2 documents were provided in Braille.

### **Customer Feedback**

Along with an extensive consultation framework, the Department has a formal comments and complaints procedure in place to allow customers to give feedback on the quality of services they receive. We want customers to let us know when things go wrong, when they get a good service, or how services can be improved. A new process for dealing with comments or complaints, and a new system to monitor them was put in place at the end of 2009 and training was provided to some 50 supervisors and staff in headquarters buildings and local offices. This was supported by new online services for customers who wish to give feedback through our website [www.welfare.ie](http://www.welfare.ie). The new process will be monitored during the coming years and will assist in developing policies and service delivery mechanisms.

### **Redress and Review**

With the aim of achieving consistency in decision making and providing clarification on issues, the Department's Decisions Advisory Office (DAO) continued to liaise with the Social Welfare Appeals Office during 2009 and to provide advice and support to deciding officers. Training was provided to 207 deciding officers in local offices and regional support units in Carrick-on-Shannon, Roscommon, and Dundalk, as well as headquarters buildings in Dublin, Sligo and Longford. Presentations were also given at two training courses for Local Office managers.

---

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.welfare.ie/ga/Pages/default.aspx>

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.welfare.ie/GA/Pages/azindex.aspx?tab=publications> and  
<http://www.welfare.ie/GA/Pages/azindex.aspx?tab=forms>

The Social Welfare Appeals Office provides redress by way of independent appeal for social welfare customers. A total of 17,787 appeals were finalised, of which 48% were determined in favour of the appellant. The annual reports of the Social Welfare Appeals Office are available on the Office's website - [www.socialwelfareappeals.ie](http://www.socialwelfareappeals.ie).

### **Freedom of Information (FOI)**

During 2009, a total of 556 FOI requests were received in the Department, of which 9 were subsequently withdrawn. Of the requests received, 508 (91%) were from members of the public seeking access to personal records. Over 500 enquiries were received from staff members and members of the public in relation to making and handling FOI requests. Training was provided to 32 FOI officers/reviewers at 3 training seminars during the year.

### **Transfer of the Community Welfare Service (CWS) from the Health Service Executive**

The Supplementary Welfare Allowance (SWA) scheme is currently administered by the community welfare service of the Health Service Executive (HSE) on behalf of the Department<sup>26</sup>. A considerable amount of preparatory work has been carried out by the Department together with the Department of Health and Children and the HSE, in order to progress the transfer of the Community Welfare Service (CWS) to the Department. Discussions commenced with the unions representing CWS staff in the Labour Relations Commission in September 2009 following on from a previous set of negotiations during 2008 which were facilitated by an independent chairman, but where discussions had reached an impasse. The Department's intention is to reach agreement with all of the unions concerned as soon as is practical in order that the service can be transferred.

### **Transfer of Treatment Benefit Schemes to the Health Sector**

An inter-departmental working group, led by the Department of Health and Children, examined the possibility of the transfer of the Treatment Benefits Schemes from the Department to the Department of Health and Children. Their work is now being reviewed in the light of the changes introduced to the Treatment Benefit Scheme in Budget 2010.

### **Agencies under the aegis of the Department**

Citizens Information Board - The implementation of the Citizens Information Board (CIB) Strategic Plan 2009 – 2012 "*Pathways to Services - Putting Citizens at the Centre*"<sup>27</sup> is monitored and supported by the Department. A Department official represents the Minister on the board of the CIB. From July 2009, the responsibility for the Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) transferred to the Citizens Information Board (CIB). The CIB has experience in providing strong management support to the voluntary and community sector in the provision of a quality local public service. It will provide the 53 MABS companies with strong national leadership in the provision of a high quality service to meet the needs of people encountering debt difficulties.

### Pensions Board

The Department works closely with the Pensions Board<sup>28</sup> on the development of pension policy and regulation. In 2009, the board continued to provide input to the development of a long-term framework on pensions. The Minister is represented on the board by a Department official and the Department also participates in the work of various groups, including the Finance and Audit Committee and the National Pensions Awareness Campaign, to oversee and advance the board's work in particular areas.

---

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.welfare.ie/EN/Schemes/SupplementaryWelfareAllowance/Pages/default.aspx>

<sup>27</sup> [http://www.citizensinformationboard.ie/about/downloads/Strategic\\_Plan\\_2009\\_2012.pdf](http://www.citizensinformationboard.ie/about/downloads/Strategic_Plan_2009_2012.pdf)

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.pensionsboard.ie/>

#### Office of the Pensions Ombudsman

The Pensions Ombudsman<sup>29</sup> is empowered to investigate complaints from beneficiaries or potential beneficiaries of pension schemes and personal retirement savings accounts. He is independent in the performance of his functions. The Pensions Ombudsman submits an annual report to the Minister on his activities, together with proposals for change that he considers appropriate to facilitate investigations and to make determinations. The accounts of his office are audited by the Comptroller and Auditor General.

#### Family Support Agency

The Family Support Agency<sup>30</sup> provides a direct, nationwide family mediation service and supports, promotes and develops the provision of marriage and relationship counselling, other family supports and the Family and Community Services Resource Centre Programme. The relationship between the Department and the Family Support Agency is one of continuous and effective cooperation and communication, and the Department is represented on the board of the agency<sup>31</sup>. In 2009, the Family Support Agency supported 107 Family Resource Centres; some 600 organisations providing marriage, child and bereavement counselling services; and family mediation services to some 1,400 couples. Research completed during the year included a study of the *“Role of Grandparents in Divorced and Separated Families in Ireland”*.

---

<sup>29</sup> <http://www.pensionsombudsman.ie/>

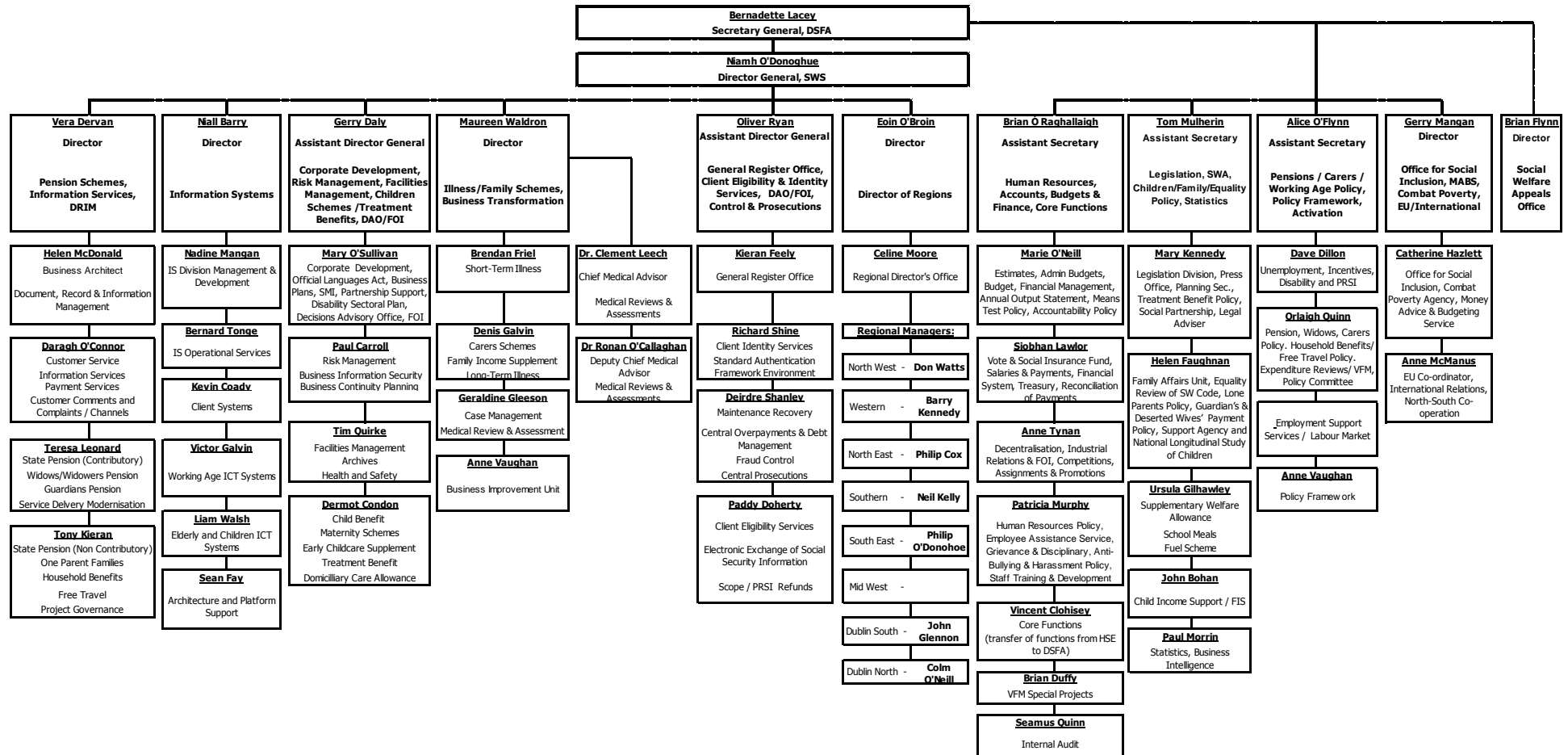
<sup>30</sup> [www.fsa.ie](http://www.fsa.ie)

<sup>31</sup> In April 2010 the Government reassigned responsibility for the Family Support Agency to the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs

## APPENDICES

# Appendix 1

## Social & Family Affairs Organisational Structure - December 2009



## Appendix 2                      Budget 2010

A wide range of supports were fully maintained at 2009 levels, including:

- The level of pensions and other payments to people aged 66 years and over, including payments for pensioners' dependent spouses aged under 66 years.
- The level of the extra allowances paid to pensioners and people with disabilities who live alone and those who are aged over 80 years.
- The household benefits package, which includes the free television licence, electricity-gas allowance and telephone allowance, and free travel scheme as well as fuel allowances.
- Half-rate payments of Carer's Allowance to persons in receipt of another welfare payment and the value of the respite care grant at €1,700 per annum.
- The domiciliary care allowance paid to parents and guardians of severely disabled or ill children under 16 years of age.
- Funding for the 107 Family Resource Centres and grants for counselling and mediation programmes.

Budget 2010 also provided for a range of measures to reduce overall public expenditure and to restore stability to the public finances. These measures included:

- A reduction of €16 per month in Child Benefit monthly rates of payment. Full compensation was provided to families who are dependent on welfare payments or receiving the family income supplement.
- Reductions, ranging from 3.5% to 4.2%, in the weekly rates of payment for those aged under 66 years.
- The introduction of reduced rates of payment to new Jobseeker's Allowance claimants aged 24 years and under. Reduced rates will also apply to jobseekers of any age who unreasonably refuse offers of training or education.
- The limitation of benefits available in 2010 under the dental and optical strands of the Treatment Benefits scheme to free dental and optical examinations only. The medical and surgical appliances scheme is not affected.
- Additional fraud and control savings of over €33 million to give total savings of €533 million are being targeted for 2010, through enhanced targeting of particular schemes and the introduction of new anti-fraud powers provided for by way of legislation.
- Savings of €20 million resulting from reductions in the maximum rent levels for new or renewed Rent Supplement tenancies, while savings of €2 million are being made through restructuring of the regional support agencies that work with the family resource centres.

## Appendix 3 Control Savings and Reviews in 2009

### Reviews and Savings

The Department continues to work to deter people from committing benefit fraud in the first place; to reduce errors in processing; and to detect fraud and error by utilising technology to match data from across all scheme and service areas. For example, data from the General Register Office (GRO) on deaths registered is processed and passed to all the Department scheme databases. Also, during the year, a matching exercise was carried out whereby information on earnings, which is maintained on the Department's central records system, was extracted for customers with active claims under the non-contributory schemes and matched with other schemes.

The Department seeks to recover monies received fraudulently or without entitlement and pursues all those who defraud the social welfare system including recourse to prosecution where appropriate. The outcomes of the Department's control activity were also highlighted in press releases during the year and the outcomes of court prosecutions, where possible, were publicised in the local and national press. Review policies focus control activity on the high risk areas within schemes and on claims that have been identified as having a higher risk of fraud and abuse.

During the year some 750,000 control reviews were carried out on schemes yielding savings of €484 million. In Child Benefit some 288,000 reviews were carried out giving savings of some €90m; in jobseeker schemes some 142,000 reviews yielded savings of €60m; in Illness Benefit approximately 182,000 reviews gave savings of nearly €90m; and in State Pensions, Widows(er)'s Pension and Household Benefit schemes some 35,600 control reviews were carried out yielding savings of some €104 million. The full breakdown is as follows:

	Reviews	Savings (€m)
Child Benefit	288,050	89.08
Family Income Supplement	24,611	17.42
Jobseeker Schemes	141,859	60.59
One-Parent Family Payment	73,836	97.40
PRSI Inspections	1,560	5.58
State Pension Schemes	16,102	73.06
Widows/Widowers Pension	1,096	19.71
Household Benefit Schemes	18,435	11.18
Illness Schemes	182,317	89.91
Carers Allowance	2,948	12.86

In addition, control savings of €7.11 million were achieved on Supplementary Welfare Allowance.

### Disability Allowance and Carers schemes

Control review policies have been initiated for Disability Allowance and Carers schemes. In this regard a project to establish the continuing eligibility of some 3,000 people to Carer's Allowance was undertaken in 2009 and yielded savings of approximately €3.1m. New Carer's Allowance control initiatives have also been implemented through the generation of daily warning reports for Carers Section. Where a customer is either a carer or a person caring for someone, a report is triggered by notification of any of the following live events:

- change of address
- change of marital status
- commencement of employment
- death

## **State Pensions**

An internal audit review was completed in the State Pension section in early 2009 and results show that the State Pension Contributory (SPC) scheme is a low risk, low error scheme with negligible fraud costs.

Savings increased substantially in 2009 over 2008 as a result of a more focused approach to reviews and an active management of all control information. Savings of €23.7m were achieved as follows:

- €14.86m savings achieved from termination of 493 State Pension Transition and State Pension Contributory claims as a result of deaths notified by GRO
- €5.9m savings achieved from SPC continuing eligibility reviews involving 421 pension and 104 allowance-only terminations (from continuing eligibility certificates issued to 8,612 customers)
- €3.1m savings achieved from 126 pension terminations from an SPC 'mail shot' issue.

## **Widows**

Some €19.7m savings were achieved where claims were terminated in respect of 635 Widow/er's claims where the Department obtained electronic information through GRO reports which had not been notified by customers or their next of kin. Also, a Continuing Eligibility project targeted at 4,000 overseas customers commenced in 2009.

Arising from the Service Delivery Modernisation project, a revised organisational structure was put in place in the widow's pension area. This included the establishment of a dedicated control, risk management and quality control unit to facilitate a more focused approach to reviews and active management of control information and activities.

## **Child Benefit**

A certification project on Child Benefit has allowed for substantial volumes of on-going reviews of claims. Certification involves the automatic issue of letters to selected customers to confirm their ongoing entitlement to benefit. During the year, the frequency of the certification forms increased from six monthly to three monthly. The savings on this project were over €63m with some 7,400 claims terminated in 2009.

## **Medical Review**

The main function of the Medical Review and Assessment Service is the assessment and review of medical eligibility for all illness, disability and carer income support payments and other related schemes and entitlements. During the year, over 84,000 desk assessments were carried out with some 62,200 customers being referred for 'in person' assessments. This resulted in control savings of €58.3m made up of Illness Benefit reviews €49.3m, Disability Allowance reviews €6.1m and Invalidity Pension reviews €2.9m.

The ongoing Renaissance Project provides for an early, integrated, multidisciplinary intervention to identify susceptible persons with simple low back pain and prevent their progression to chronic back pain. Some 24,000 customers have been referred for medical review since the start of the project in January 2003 to the end of 2009. Of the number referred, almost 14,400 submitted a final certificate while some 3,000 were found capable of work which resulted in a claim closure rate of 73%.

## **Court Proceedings**

During the year a total of 308 cases were forwarded to the Chief State Solicitor's Office for the initiation of court proceedings, including 7 civil cases. Civil cases are taken to facilitate (i) the recovery of scheme overpayments (ii) the collection of PRSI arrears (iii) the enforcement of maintenance recovery orders against the liable relatives of One-Parent Family Payment recipients and (iv) the enforcement of determinations made by the Pensions Ombudsman's Office.



356 cases were finalised in 2009 with the following results:

<u>Outcome</u>	<u>Number</u>
Fined	228
Prison sentences	11
Suspended Sentence	34
Community Service	11
Probation Act	49
Struck out/dismissed/Withdrawn	16
Adjourned with liberty to re-enter	4
Convicted, no penalty	1
Judgement obtained	1
Enforcement order obtained	1
 TOTAL	 356

## Appendix 4

## Legislation enacted in 2009

	Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2009
	Social Welfare and Pensions (No. 2) Act 2009
S.I. No. 22 of 2009	Occupational Pension Schemes (Revaluation) Regulations 2009
S.I. No. 24 of 2009	Social Welfare (Consolidated Claims, Payments and Control) (Amendment) (Jobseeker's Benefit) Regulations, 2009
S.I. No. 54 of 2009	Social Welfare (Consolidated Claims, Payments and Control) (Amendment) (No. 2) (Early Childcare Supplement) Regulations 2009
S.I. No. 62 of 2009	Occupational Pension Schemes (Funding Standard) (Amendment) Regulations 2009
S.I. No. 69 of 2009	Social Welfare (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2008 (Section 24) (Commencement) Order 2009
S.I. No. 70 of 2009	Occupational Pension Schemes (Preservation of Benefits) (Amendment) Regulations 2009
S.I. No. 112 of 2009	Social Welfare (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2008 (Section 8) (Commencement) Order 2009
S.I. No. 143 of 2009	Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2008 (Sections 15 and 16) (Commencement) Order, 2009
S.I. No. 162 of 2009	Social Welfare (Consolidated Claims, Payments and Control) (Domiciliary Care Allowance) (Amendment) (No. 3) Regulations 2009
S.I. No. 164 of 2009	Social Welfare (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2008 (Section 22) (Commencement) Order 2009
S.I. No. 177 of 2009	Occupational Pension Schemes (Duties of Trustees in connection with Bulk Transfer) Regulations 2009
S.I. No. 198 of 2009	Social Welfare (Reduction of Payments to Health Professionals) Regulations 2009
S.I. No. 202 of 2009	Social Welfare (Consolidated Supplementary Welfare Allowance) (Amendment) (Rent Supplement) Regulations 2009
S.I. No. 230 of 2009	Social Welfare (Consolidated Claims, Payments and Control) (Amendment) (No. 4) (Island Allowance) Regulations 2009
S.I. No. 240 of 2009	Social Welfare (Consolidated Claims, Payments and Control) (Amendment) (No. 5) (Prescribed Time) Regulations 2009
S.I. No. 241 of 2009	Social Welfare (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2008 (Part 5) (Commencement) Order 2009
S.I. No. 244 of 2009	Social Welfare (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2008 (Part 4) (Commencement) Order 2009
S.I. No. 265 of 2009	Social Welfare (Consolidated Supplementary Welfare Allowance) (Amendment) (No. 2) (Rent Supplement) Regulations 2009
S.I. No. 347 of 2009	Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2008 (Section 17) (Commencement) Order 2009
S.I. No. 378 of 2009	Social Welfare (Consolidated Claims, Payments and Control) (Amendment) (No. 6) (Nominated Persons) Regulations 2009
S.I. No. 465 of 2009	Occupational Pension Schemes (Fees) (Amendment) Regulations 2009
S.I. No. 506 of 2009	Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2008 (Section 28) (Commencement) Order 2009
S.I. No. 509 of 2009	Occupational Pension Schemes (Wind-Up) Regulations 2009
S.I. No. 563 of 2009	Social Welfare (Consolidated Contributions and Insurability) (Amendment) (Refunds) Regulations, 2009
S.I. No. 564 of 2009	Social Welfare (Consolidated Claims, Payments and Control) (Amendment) (No. 8) (Prescribed Time) Regulations, 2009
S.I. No. 565 of 2009	Social Welfare (Occupational Injuries) (Amendment) Regulations 2009

S.I. No. 578 of 2009	Social Welfare (Consolidated Claims, Payments and Control) (Amendment) (No. 9) (Treatment Benefit) Regulations 2009
S.I. No. 584 of 2009	Social Welfare (Consolidated Claims, Payments and Control) (Amendment) (No. 7) (Change in Rates) Regulations 2009
S.I. No. 585 of 2009	Social Welfare (Consolidated Contributions and Insurability) (Amendment) (No. 2) (Contributions) Regulations, 2009

Note 1. The Department did not conduct any Regulatory Impact Assessments (RIA) during 2009.

Note 2. European Union (Scrutiny) Act. Previous annual reports have included details of EU proposals submitted to the Oireachtas under the European Union (Scrutiny) Act. No such proposals arose in 2009.

## **Appendix 5      Public Procurement and Capital Appraisal**

In addition to the Guidelines for the Engagement of Consultants in the Civil Service (March 1999) and the Guidelines for the Appraisal and Management of Capital Expenditure Proposals in the Public Sector of February 2005 and as part of ongoing reforms in relation to public expenditure management, Departments are obliged to include in their annual report progress on their capital programmes in excess of €30 million. While none of the Department's projects exceeded €30 million in 2009, the following have cost over €30 million since their initiation.

### **Service Delivery Modernisation Programme**

The Service Delivery Modernisation (SDM) programme is a multi-annual programme of continuous development involving the re-design of back office systems, business processes, procedures and work practices and the introduction of new organisational structures along with the introduction of new technology and the replacement of legacy computer systems. The replacement for legacy systems is a new system developed around a Business Object Model, known as the Business Object Model implementation (BOMi).

While none of the individual projects involved cost over €30 million, expenditure on all SDM related projects in the period since commencement (2001 to end 2009) amounts to €63,724,345.

SDM is being implemented in a number of self-contained projects, each of which aims to deliver key business benefits, extend the business object model and, where appropriate, strengthen and enhance the underlying technical architecture.

The key business objectives are to provide:

- a high quality, proactive, personalised service to customers;
- delivery of services in a more efficient, flexible and integrated way;
- support for new work management practices and procedures;
- support for the recording of overpayments and debt recovery; and
- delivery of the eGovernment strategy.

These developments allow the Department to be more agile in responding to changes in Government policies and customer needs. The aim is to have comprehensive service delivery, based around efficient customer centric transaction processing and integration of services, for the benefit of the customer while also providing a much-improved working environment for staff.

#### SDM Phase 1

Focused on the Child Benefit scheme, it was successfully implemented in November 2002.

#### SDM Phase 2

This phase commenced in May 2004 and included State Pension (Transition), State Pension (Contributory), Free Travel, Bereavement Grant, Early Childcare Supplement, Overpayment and Debt Management, and transfer of the Child Benefit scheme onto a newer technical platform in 2007. It also included the Household Benefits and Free Travel schemes in mid 2007.

#### SDM Phase 3

A four year Framework Agreement was established with three economic operators, with effect from January 2008.

#### Customer Object Development (COD)

This is the first in a series of projects to move the Department's primary customer Central Records System to the new platform. This project delivered a new architectural solution as the basis for the migration and enrichment of customer management business functionality and was completed in Q1 2009.

#### Widows SDM Project

The BOMi was extended to encompass Widow's and Widower's (Contributory) Pension scheme; Widowed Parent Grant scheme; and the Fuel Allowance scheme. The project included redesigned business processes and organisational structures aligned to the technology transformation and was completed in Q2 2009.

#### Medical referral and Case Management Project

This project is currently underway to implement organisational and technical change in the Medical Review and Assessment Service and to develop a generic case management system which can be modified for use elsewhere. The first live release was Q3 2009 with the project scheduled for implementation in 2010.

#### Technical Support and Maintenance

A contract is in place for technical support, maintenance and enhancement of the Business Object Model implementation (BOMi); support and ongoing operation of the continuous build and integration process; release management; and operation and ongoing development of the central test function.

A number of additional developments were undertaken in 2009 as mini-projects under the technical support contract and "in house" projects undertaken by the staff of the Department's Information Services Division (ISD). These included further developments in the area of scanning of application forms and other documentation; enhancements to communicate with customers using SMS text messages; and the provision of electronic facilities to customers to complete claims and other online forms via the Department's website.

#### Financial Management and Reporting Systems

The first release of the new Payment and Agency Reconciliation Platform (PARP) was in June 2009. The PARP system provides an integrated reconciliation solution to reconcile all the Department's payment instruments and associated agency accounts and integrates with the Department's financial and payment generating systems. A subsequent release in December 2009 provides enhanced financial reporting and customer identity supports. The PARP system now provides a single repository for all welfare payments on a single database delivering process efficiencies and enhanced financial reporting and reconciliation.

#### Local Office Process Modernisation (LOPM)

Enhancements to the BOMi to assist staff in dealing with the increased volume of people seeking Jobseekers' payments included suppressing of paper reports and automatic issuing of correspondence; and initial work on the provision of claiming facilities, and certification of unemployment via electronic channels.

#### Additional Schemes

Work also commenced on the migration of a number of further schemes to the BOMi during 2009 including Invalidity Pension, State Pension (Non Contributory), Disability Allowance and Carer's Allowance.

## Appendix 6

## Value for Money and Policy Reviews

The Value for Money and Policy Review Initiative provides a basis for a systematic analysis of what is being achieved by expenditure in each programme area. Since the launch of the expenditure review initiative in 1997, the Department has completed 24 expenditure or VFM reviews. During the year work on the Review of Information Services was finalised and work on the Review of Disability Allowance continued. A Review of Child Income Support commenced during the year.

In 2008 the Government decided that the 2009-2011 round of reviews would focus more on major areas of expenditure particularly in the health, education, social welfare and justice sectors which between them account for almost 75% of total gross expenditure in 2008. In addition, it was agreed that each of these four Departments would conduct one review per year, while all other Departments, the Office of Public Works and the Office of the Revenue Commissioners will each be required to carry out two reviews over the three year period. A more direct role for the Department of Finance, including a requirement for that Department to be represented on Steering Committees for all VFM reviews, and the requirement to appoint an independent chairperson to each Steering Committee was established. The Review of Child Income Support is being conducted under these new arrangements.

The recommendations made in completed expenditure/VFM reviews are monitored on an ongoing basis by the Department's Policy Committee. Progress during 2009 on ongoing expenditure/VFM reviews and implementation of recommendations from completed reviews is set out below.

### **Review under the 2009 Round**

#### ***Review of Child Income Support***

In mid-2009, the Department commenced a review of Child Income Support policy and associated spending programmes (Child Benefit, Family Income Supplement and Increases for Qualified Children). This is the first review to be conducted under the new arrangements for VFM and Policy Reviews. A Steering Group with an independent chairman met five times during the year. Work progressed on an analysis of the key evaluation questions associated with the agreed Terms of Reference. This allowed for the preparation of a preliminary report in November 2009 that contained an overview of policy objectives and main spending trends. However, it was not possible to sign-off the interim report because of prospective developments in Budget 2010. Work will continue on the review in 2010 including consultation with interested organisations. It is intended that the final report will be completed during 2010 and will reach specific conclusions and recommendations for reform.

### **Reviews to be completed under the 2006-2008 round**

#### ***Review of Information Services***

This is a review of the provision of information by the Department and the provision of social welfare information by the Citizens Information Board. This review was finalised during Q4 2009 and approved by the Department's Policy Committee<sup>32</sup>.

#### ***Review of Disability Allowance***

Completion of this review was deferred pending the publication by the Central Statistics Office of the second round of results of the 2006 National Disability Survey. As this has been repeatedly deferred, an extensive survey of Disability Allowance claims was undertaken instead. The report will be published in 2010.

### **Completed reviews under the 2006-2008 round**

Many of the recommendations in those reviews completed under the 2006-2008 round have been implemented and progress on implementing others continued during 2009.

---

<sup>32</sup> The Information Services review was published in early 2010 and is available on the website at: [http://www.welfare.ie/EN/Policy/CorporatePublications/Finance/exp\\_rev/Documents/VFM\\_revew2009.pdf](http://www.welfare.ie/EN/Policy/CorporatePublications/Finance/exp_rev/Documents/VFM_revew2009.pdf)

## ***Supplementary Welfare Allowance – Phase 2***

Progress has been made in implementing a number of the recommendations of the SWA Review.

### ***Rent and Mortgage Supplement Schemes***

The review identified a number of issues relating to the incentives under the rent supplement scheme for those wishing to take up an employment opportunity. Budget 2007 and the Supplementary Budget in April 2009 introduced a number of measures to address these issues.

In addition, the detailed operational guidelines for Mortgage Interest Supplement (MIS) have been reviewed and updated to clarify a number of operational and legislative issues. MIS continued to be kept under review during 2009 and this included participation by the Departments of Finance, and Environment, Heritage & Local Government as well as the Financial Regulator's Office. Completion of this review is expected by end Q2 2010.

### ***Core Functions Project***

The Domiciliary Care Allowance scheme was transferred to the Department of Social and Family Affairs during 2009. The transfer took place in two stages:

- Since 1 April 2009 - all new claims for Domiciliary Care Allowance are being decided by the Department.
- Since September 2009 - the Department has taken over responsibility for the payment of all Domiciliary Care Allowance claims from the Health Service Executive.

The Respite Care Grant paid with DCA involves a single annual payment usually issued in June. The HSE made those payments in 2009. The Department will make the relevant payments in June 2010.

### ***Review of One-Parent Family Payments***

It has not been possible to progress the proposals as outlined in the review, due, in part, to current economic conditions. These proposals have, however, informed deliberations regarding the scheme. The Government is currently considering various options for limiting the length of time for which the payment will be made (including the age of the youngest child). Any such changes would be phased in over a period of years for existing recipients to enable lone parents to access education and training and to prepare for their return to the labour market.

### ***Review of the Medical Review and Assessment Service***

Progress has been made on a number of recommendations contained in the report. Nine new Medical Assessors have been recruited over the period October 2007 to January 2009 to fill existing vacancies and a further four are in the process of being recruited. This will increase the Medical Assessor cadre to 27, of whom 12 will be based in regional centres.

The number of medical assessment centres, currently 51, is kept under continuous review with the aim of providing good quality accessible accommodation to meet the needs of our customers. To date, seven centres have been closed while two new centres were opened in 2009 in Athlone and Buncrana.

### ***Unemployment Benefit/Assistance (now known as Jobseeker's Benefit/Assistance) for atypical workers***

The Department has conducted a 'Review of the Application of the Unemployment Benefit and Assistance Schemes Conditions to workers who are not employed on a full-time basis' which examined the application of the Jobseeker's Benefit/Allowance schemes conditions to workers who are not employed on a full-time basis.

The review made a number of recommendations including broadening Jobseeker's Benefit conditions to provide compensation for loss of employment in the case of part-time and other atypical workers. The report is under active consideration within the Department.

***Green Paper on Pensions (policy review)***

The Green Paper on Pensions was launched by the Taoiseach, Tánaiste and Minister for Social and Family Affairs in October 2007. A report on the consultation process was published in September 2008. Work on the development of a long-term pensions framework continued during 2009<sup>33</sup>.

***Review of the Future of the Combat Poverty Agency (CPA) (policy review)***

Following completion of the Review of the Combat Poverty Agency (CPA) in September 2008, the Government decided to integrate the CPA and the Office for Social Inclusion within the Department. The necessary legislative provisions are contained in Part 5 of the Social Welfare (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 2008. These provide, inter alia, for the dissolution of the Combat Poverty Agency and the transfer of the staff, assets and liabilities of the Agency to the Minister for Social and Family Affairs. The Commencement Order was signed by the Minister to give effect to Part 5 from 1 July 2009. This process culminated in the formation of a new Social Inclusion Division in July 2009<sup>34</sup>. It creates a unified structure combining the significant experience, expertise and knowledge among the staff of both bodies and is designed to provide more effective and streamlined support for Government and the wider community in addressing issues of poverty and social exclusion.

---

<sup>33</sup> The National Pensions Framework was published in March 2010. It is available at the following link: [http://www.pensionsgreenpaper.ie/publications\\_nationalframework.html](http://www.pensionsgreenpaper.ie/publications_nationalframework.html)

<sup>34</sup> In April 2010 the Government reassigned responsibility for the Social Inclusion Division to the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs.



## **Appendix 7      Performance against Customer Charter Standards**

The new Customer Charter was published in 2009. The Charter outlines the Department's commitments to customers. The achievements against those commitments are as follows:

### **Serve you in a fair, courteous and timely manner**

Information and details of the qualification criteria for the Department's schemes and services are available widely in the Department's publications and on the Department's website [www.welfare.ie](http://www.welfare.ie). Everyone who applies for a payment from the Department is entitled to be treated equally regardless of their circumstances. Most schemes are based on legislation and staff are regularly informed of changes to conditions and rates through training courses, internal memoranda and on the Department's corporate portal, SOLAS.

Customers are entitled to be treated in a courteous manner. Customer service training is provided to staff to ensure that a high standard of service is maintained.

A number of Local Offices provide a service throughout lunchtimes to extend the times that services are available to the public. Processes and procedures in Local Offices are reviewed on an on-going basis in order to streamline them and achieve efficiencies. Many initiatives were introduced during 2009 to help reduce processing times for jobseekers' claims including, in some offices, having claims decided at the counter with the customer present.

Many sections provide a phone service from 9.00am in the morning through to 5.00pm and the volume and duration of calls are monitored and resources allocated to meet peak demands and improve response times.

Customers can also contact the Department electronically by email or by using online services. New "Contact Us" and online services pages have been developed in 2009 – see <http://www.welfare.ie/EN/ContactUs/Pages/default.aspx> - giving access to services at a time and place that suits customers' needs.

### **Respect your privacy**

Private interview rooms are available in most offices for customers. New staff are informed of the need to respect the privacy of customers as part of their induction process. Contractors who provide a service to the Department must agree to conform to requirements in respect of the privacy of personal data.

### **Protect your information**

The Department is committed to protecting the rights and privacy of individuals in accordance with the Data Protection Acts 1998 and 2003. As part of its work, the Department may need to store or use certain personal data about customers in order to carry out its day to day work and meet its legal obligations. The Department has a Data Protection Policy which has been approved by the Secretary General. Any breach of trust with regard to the confidentiality of information is treated as serious misconduct under the Disciplinary Code and comes under immediate consideration for dismissal.

Staff are reminded by circular and by message alerts on internal communication systems of their obligations under both the Official Secrets Act and the Data Protection Act.

### **Provide you with full and clear information**

The Department operates a network of some 125 local and branch offices throughout the country. All local offices provide information and supply application forms for the various schemes offered, with many offices having dedicated information officers. This locally based service is supported by a central Information Unit which operates a LoCall information line (1890 66 22 44) that customers may call for

information and guidance on their entitlements. Information staff attend exhibitions and seminars throughout the country promoting information on social welfare rights and entitlements.

Information leaflets and application forms are reviewed on an ongoing basis and updated with reference to plain English guidelines. In addition, information on the Department's schemes and services is available on the Department's website, [www.welfare.ie](http://www.welfare.ie).

The Citizens Information Board, which comes under the aegis of the Department, also provides information through over 260 Citizens Information Centres and other outlets around the country, through a phone service which operates from 9am to 9pm Monday to Friday, and on their website [www.citizensinformation.ie](http://www.citizensinformation.ie).

Customers receive a letter informing them of the decisions on their claims. Where a customer is disqualified, or a claim is disallowed or allowed at a reduced rate, details of the decision are given to the customer. It is standard practice across all scheme areas to inform customers of their right to a review and the right of appeal. Customers are also informed of their right to contact the Ombudsman where appropriate.

### **Use modern technology to improve our service to you**

The Department has upgraded its telephony infrastructure to enhance supports for voice and data traffic along with the provision of LoCall numbers for each of the Department's headquarters buildings. New telephony management software has now been installed in a number of business areas such as in Information Services and State Pension areas based in Sligo, Illness Benefits section, Client Eligibility Services (Buncrana and Waterford) and Client Identity Services (Carrick-on-Shannon). This has not only allowed us to better manage our phone services, and ensure customers get to talk to the right section when they call, but it also allows us to respond more effectively to changes in demand or unforeseen peaks in telephone traffic.

An interpretation service supports regional staff to deal effectively and efficiently with customers with a limited command of English. The interpretation service is a three-way phone system, a handset telephone with a headphone attached that enables two people at one end of the line to hold a telephone conversation with the person at the other end. All Local Offices have the facility to provide this service.

SMS (text messaging) was first introduced by the Department in late 2008. Customers can request application forms for various schemes and services, as well as statements of the amount of benefit/pension paid to them, by texting details to 51909.

The Department's website [www.welfare.ie](http://www.welfare.ie) is now recognised by staff, third party information providers, and customers, as the location of the most up to date information on the Department's schemes and services. It is expected that over time this will reduce the need for paper information leaflets.

The range of jobseeker-related information on the website was extended during 2009 to include downloadable application forms, a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) area, the creation of dedicated Local Office pages which include maps, as well as an online "sign-off" form now in use in almost forty Local Offices and being extended nationwide.

An online statement request service was introduced in February 2009, followed by an online facility for requesting copies of social insurance records in March 2009. Customers can also contact the Department electronically by email or using online services and a new "Contact Us" webpage was developed in 2009<sup>35</sup>. Online claiming for State Pension Contributory and Household Benefits was introduced in March 2009 and extended to include Widow(er)'s Contributory Pension in December 2009.

---

<sup>35</sup> <http://www.welfare.ie/EN/ContactUs/Pages/default.aspx>

### **Inform you of your rights and entitlements**

The Department issued details of second chance education opportunities to almost 55,000 jobseekers in the 18-25 age groups in May. Information on a Disability Open Day was issued to people in Co. Westmeath who were receiving illness payment from this Department, to let them know that they would be able to access information on their entitlements and services. Also, during 2009, the Department informed over 11,000 customers in counties Cork, Mayo and Dublin by mailshot letter of education and training programmes available locally.

As part of the Department's consultation framework, regular meetings are held with customer representative groups to update them on proposed improvements and changes to schemes and services. In 2009, topics covered included changes to procedures for the appointment of agents to collect payments, the Mortgage Interest Supplement Scheme, and the re-launch of the An Post Household Budgeting Service.

### **Provide redress where you have a complaint**

The Department wants customers to let us know when things go wrong, when they get a good service, or how services can be improved. A new process for registering and monitoring comments and complaints was introduced in 2009. The new system will make it easier for comments and complaints to be logged and will provide enhanced reporting and monitoring of complaints. This system also allows for a comment which is complimentary to be recorded.

The Department encourages customers to let us have their views in one of the following ways:

- log on to 'www.welfare.ie'
- email [qcs@welfare.ie](mailto:qcs@welfare.ie)
- LoCall 1890 66 22 44 (9am to 5pm)
- Drop in to a Social Welfare Local Office
- Write to Customer Services, Social Welfare Services, College Road, Sligo

Posters are available in all our offices promoting the Comments and Complaints System. Customers can also access our website for this facility.

## Appendix 8 Ministers in Charge of the Department since 1947

	<b>From</b>	<b>To</b>
James Ryan	22 January 1947	18 February 1948
William Norton	18 February 1948	14 June 1951
James Ryan	14 June 1951	2 June 1954
Brendan Corish	2 June 1954	20 March 1957
Patrick Smyth	20 March 1957	27 November 1957
Sean McEntee	27 November 1957	24 June 1959
Sean McEntee	24 June 1959	12 October 1961
Kevin Boland	12 October 1961	21 April 1965
Kevin Boland	21 April 1965	16 November 1966
Joseph Brennan	16 November 1966	2 July 1969
Kevin Boland	2 July 1969	6 May 1970
Joseph Brennan	6 May 1970	14 March 1973
Brendan Corish	14 March 1973	5 July 1977
Charles J Haughey	5 July 1977	12 December 1979
Michael Woods	12 December 1979	30 June 1981
Eileen Desmond	30 June 1981	9 March 1982
Michael Woods	9 March 1982	14 December 1982
Barry Desmond	14 December 1982	14 February 1986
Gemma Hussey	14 February 1986	10 March 1987
Michael Woods	10 March 1987	18 July 1989
Michael Woods	18 July 1989	13 November 1991
Brendan Daly	13 November 1991	11 February 1992
Charlie McCreevy	11 February 1992	12 January 1993
Michael Woods	12 January 1993	15 December 1994
Proinsias De Rossa	15 December 1994	26 June 1997
Dermot Ahern	26 June 1997	17 June 2002
Mary Coughlan	17 June 2002	29 September 2004
Seamus Brennan	29 September 2004	15 June 2007
Martin Cullen	15 June 2007	7 May 2008
Mary Hanafin	7 May 2008	23 March 2010
Éamon Ó Cuív	23 March 2010	