

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL AND FAMILY AFFAIRS **ANNUAL REPORT 2006**

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

Department of Social and Family Affairs

An Roinn Gnóthaí Sóisialacha agus Teaghlaigh

www.welfare.ie



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Tá leagan Gaeilge den tuarascáil seo ar fáil.

Chun cóip a fháil is féidir glaoch ar **Fhorbairt Chorporáideach** ag 01 6732191
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FOREWORD FROM THE MINISTER



I welcome the publication of my Department's Annual Report for 2006.

The developments which are outlined in the Report show clearly the significant progress we have made in implementing real and significant improvement in social welfare provision and in modernising the system to make it more relevant to changing needs in society. As the member of Government charged with the responsibility for the Department, I am proud of our achievements in this regard.

Many of the initiatives we have introduced – for pensioners, for people of working age and for families – will bring about long-term improvement in the opportunities available to the groups concerned and their full participation in society.

Expenditure on social provision in 2006 exceeded €13.5 billion – an increase of 11.7% on 2005.

This Report outlines how this major expenditure was used. The most vulnerable sectors of society – the unemployed, those unable to work due to illness and the elderly – benefited significantly from the 2006 Budget increases. The introduction of the Early Childcare supplement and the significant increases in Child Benefit in 2006 are further indicators of our commitment to families and to helping them meet the costs which they face.

I place particular priority on ensuring that people avail fully of the services to which they are entitled and the success of various initiatives to improve information provision and to promote schemes and services more effectively have been of particular satisfaction to me. I would like to thank all of the staff of my Department for their commitment to their work and for their support during the year.

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Seamus Brennan". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending from the end.

Seamus Brennan, TD
Minister for Social and Family Affairs

INTRODUCTION FROM THE SECRETARY-GENERAL



This report documents the progress made in 2006 in delivering our commitments under the Department's Statement of Strategy 2005-2007: *Security with Opportunity*.

The Department is responsible for a very significant proportion of public expenditure and the schemes and services which we deliver impact on the lives of every family in the State. The effective and efficient delivery of those schemes and services is our primary responsibility and I believe this Department has delivered effectively on this responsibility during 2006.

We have also, as this report shows, made progress in modernising and improving our delivery systems and in supporting the improved delivery of services by other Departments and agencies. Change is a constant feature of our work. The Department has delivered on significant changes during 2006 and further changes are being worked on.

I want to pay tribute to the commitment and dedication of the Department's staff during 2006, those involved in front-line service delivery, in essential services in support of that, or in the support of the wider policy-making process. We have wide-ranging responsibilities which would be impossible to deliver on effectively without the flexibility and commitment of staff throughout the Department.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'John Hynes'.

John Hynes
Secretary-General

CHAPTER 01

THE DEPARTMENT - ITS BUSINESS AND ORGANISATION

THE DEPARTMENT - ITS BUSINESS AND ORGANISATION

→ The main functions of the Department are:

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

The main business of the Department continues to be the provision of income support, including insurance (PRSI) based payments, social assistance (means tested) payments, associated secondary benefits and universal schemes such as child benefit. The Department is also responsible for the provision, either directly or indirectly through its agencies, of other services designed to support individuals and families in participating actively in society. This also requires collaboration with other Government Departments and Agencies and with the voluntary and community sector.

Social Welfare Services (SWS) is the executive arm of the Department and is responsible for the administration and management of social welfare schemes and services through a network of local, regional and other offices. Our main offices are located in Dublin, Dundalk, Letterkenny, Longford, Sligo and Waterford.

Regional Structure: The local delivery of some services and control related activities is structured on a regional basis. Within these regions there is a network of 58 Social Welfare Local Offices (SWLOs) and 68 Branch Offices (SWBOs).

Social Welfare Appeals Office is the independent Office responsible for determining appeals against decisions on social welfare entitlements.

The **Reach** agency (www.reachservices.ie), which reports to the Department, was established to promote radical improvement in public service delivery by developing a range of common services for Departments and agencies to be delivered through the Public Sector Broker (PSB).

→ Organisation of the Department

The Department employs over 4,700 people and is structured on Aireacht/Executive lines.

The **Aireacht** provides a range of corporate services comprising Personnel (including the Employee Assistance Service), Corporate and Staff Development Units, Finance, and Internal Audit. It also includes the policy area - the Planning Division - which is responsible for the formulation of social protection and other social support policies, the preparation of legislation and for the provision of policy support and advice to the Minister.

MANAGEMENT BOARD



JOHN HYNES
Secretary General



BERNADETTE LACEY
Director General



TOM MULHERIN
Assistant Secretary



ALICE O'FLYNN
Assistant Secretary



BRIAN O RAGHALLAIGH
Assistant Director General



VERA DERVAN
Director



GERRY DALY
Assistant Director General



NIALL BARRY
Director



EOIN O'BROIN
Director



MAUREEN WALDRON
Director

→ Statutory Agencies

There are five offices which come under the aegis of the Department:

- **Citizens Information Board** (formerly Comhairle) which has responsibility for supporting the provision of independent information, advice and advocacy services for citizens. www.citizensinformation.ie/ categories is a public service information system provided over the Internet by the Board.
- **Combat Poverty Agency (CPA)** which has responsibilities in the areas of advice to the Minister, research, action programmes and information in relation to poverty in Ireland (www.cpa.ie).
- **Family Support Agency (FSA)** which is responsible for the provision of a family mediation service, the support, promotion and development of marriage and relationship counselling and other family supports, and the Family and Community Services Resource Centre programme. The Agency's responsibilities also include undertaking research, providing and disseminating information about parenting and family issues, and providing advice, information and assistance to the Minister on matters relating to families (www.fsa.ie).
- **The Pensions Board**
The Pensions Board which is responsible for overseeing the implementation of the Pensions Act which concerns the administration of occupational schemes and Personal Retirement Savings Accounts (www.pensionsboard.ie).
- **Pensions Ombudsman**
The Office of the Pensions Ombudsman investigates complaints that an individual has suffered a financial loss because of maladministration, disputes of fact or law, in relation to occupational pension schemes or Personal Retirement Savings Accounts. The Pensions Ombudsman is a statutory officer and exercises his functions independently. (www.pensionsombudsman.ie).

CHAPTER 02

2006 IN REVIEW

2006 IN REVIEW

→ The context

The Department's work in 2006 was against a strong economic background. The Irish economy continued to perform well, with GNP growing by 4.2%. Population and employment continued to grow; the labour force rose to 2.108 million in 2006 (an increase of some 360,000 or 20% in the five years since 2001). As well as increased participation rates, this increase is attributable to increased numbers of immigrants, in particular people from the new EU member states.

The Department's policies continued to be shaped in 2006 by the Social Partnership Agreement - *Sustaining Progress* - along with its successor agreement - *Towards 2016* - which was published during the year.

Key policy developments:

→ Towards 2016

The new Social Partnership agreement - *Towards 2016* - which was produced in 2006 outlines a new framework within which the policies and programmes of the Department will be developed around the key challenges which the individual person faces and the supports which are available to them at each stage in the life cycle.

A life cycle approach adopts the perspective of the person, at whatever stage of the life cycle, as the centrepiece of social policy development and is intended to ensure that policy evolves in a manner which encompasses actions across relevant departments and agencies in relation to the key life cycle stages represented by children, people of working age, older people and people with disabilities.

The lifecycle approach also offers the potential of a more streamlined, outcomes-focused approach

to monitoring and reporting on progress within social partnership across key national strategies and for improved availability and use of data.

→ Lone Parents

A Government Discussion Paper, *Proposals for Supporting Lone Parents*, was published in February 2006 following a Report prepared by the Senior Officials Group on Social Inclusion. One of the main planks of policy aimed at reducing child poverty is to improve quality employment opportunities for lone parents. Among the recommendations made were;

- Reform of income supports
- Expanded availability and range of education and training opportunities for lone parents
- Extension of the National Employment Action Plan to also include lone parents
- Focused provision of childcare
- A targeted Teen Parent Support initiative
- Improved information and advice services for lone parents.

The development of a new social assistance payment and relevant legislation to replace the One Parent Family Payment is underway with the long term aim of assisting people to achieve financial independence through supporting them to enter education, training and employment.

→ Early Childcare Supplement

The Early Childcare Supplement was introduced in 2006. This is a quarterly payment of €250 paid in respect of children under 6 who qualify for Child Benefit. The scheme is under the direction of the Office of the Minister for Children and paid by the DSFA Child Benefit Office. The first payments issued in August for the quarter April-June, with

further payments in October and December. An average of 275,000 families with a total of 385,000 children received the payment each quarter in 2006.

→ Pensions

National Pensions Review

Results from the CSO Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) for Quarter 4 2005 showed that the rate of supplementary pensions coverage had increased to 55% of those at work. Up to the end of December 2006, over 95,000 PRSA accounts had been opened with a total asset value of €835 million.

Given the slow progress being made towards overall supplementary pension coverage targets, in February 2005 the Minister requested the Pensions Board to commence a review of the overall pensions strategy and its report was published in January 2006. In general, the report favoured a continuation of the voluntary system of supplementary pensions with improved incentives. The Minister subsequently asked the Pensions Board to report on a model of mandatory provision which could be considered if it were decided this was the appropriate course for future policy. This report was published in August 2006.

Pension issues were prominent in the negotiations on the social partnership agreement *Towards 2016*. As part of the final agreement the Government is, amongst other things, committed to producing a Green Paper on pensions, which will be published in 2007. Following publication, a consultation process is planned and the Government is committed to responding to this by producing a framework for long-term pensions policy. The two Pensions Board reports form important inputs to the process.

→ Disability Sectoral Plan

The Department's Disability Sectoral Plan under Disability Act, 2005 was published in July 2006 and approved by both Houses of the Oireachtas in October 2006.

The plan was informed by a comprehensive consultation process with the Disability sector through the Disability Legislation Consultation Group, the National Disability Authority and the Department's Disability Consultative Forum. A number of written and oral submissions were also received. The Department will continue to consult with the Disability Consultative Forum with regard to the implementation of the sectoral plan.

Initiatives introduced in 2006 in line with commitments in the plan include:

- improvements in the earnings disregard, from June 2006, for people receiving Disability Allowance or Blind Pension;
- the abolition, in September 2006, of peak hour restrictions on the use of the Free Travel Pass. The result is that people with disabilities may now use their passes going to work or attending educational, rehabilitative and therapeutic courses that are, very often, central to improving their lifestyles; and
- improvements to Carer's Allowance so that, for example, a couple can earn up to €580 a week and receive the maximum rate of Carer's Allowance as well as free travel, the household benefits package and the respite care grant.

→ Legislation: Citizens Information (Comhairle) Bill

The Citizens Information Bill, 2006 was published on 12 October 2006. The Bill is a key element of the Government's National Disability Strategy. The primary purpose of the Citizens Information Bill 2006 was to amend the functions of Comhairle (renamed the Citizens Information Board (An Bord um Fhaisnéis do Shaoránaigh)) to enable the statutory body;-

- to support and promote the provision of advocacy services, for people with disabilities, that would assist them in identifying and understanding their needs and in securing their entitlements to social services; and

- to introduce a Personal Advocacy Service for certain people with disabilities, who would otherwise have difficulty in getting access to social services.

The Bill, now enacted, provides for matters such as eligibility for the assignment of a personal advocate, the arrangements for the administration of the service and for an independent appeals process for people with disabilities who are dissatisfied with the decision in relation to their eligibility for the assignment of a Personal Advocate. It is planned that the new Personal Advocacy Service will be in place early in 2008.

→ Keeping our customers informed

In 2006, nationwide advertising campaigns were undertaken for the following social welfare schemes - Family Income Supplement, Carers (Carer's Allowance, Carer's Benefit and Respite Care Grant) and Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance. A significant response was received to all campaigns.

Following the FIS campaign in March, there was a 70% increase in new claims when compared with the same period the previous year.

The number of families claiming Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance has increased in recent years from 70,000 in 2004 to over 84,000 in 2006.

→ eGovernment

The Service Delivery Modernisation (SDM) programme is a multi – annual programme of work involving the introduction of new technology and the replacement of legacy computer systems. It also involves the redesign of back office systems, business processes, procedures and work practices and the introduction of new organisational structures.

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
- delivery of the eGovernment strategy

In 2006 the SDM programme was expanded to encompass Retirement Pension, Old Age Contributory Pension (renamed State Pension (Transition) and State Pension (Contributory) in 2006), Free Travel and Bereavement Grant. The programme is being implemented on an incremental basis and will be extended to cater for the Household Benefits Package in early 2007.

The SDM programme was also extended to Free Travel and Bereavement Grant schemes in 2006.

There were a number of other developments in the wider eGovernment agenda during 2006 in which the Department was centrally involved. The completion of the first phase of the Public Sector Broker Project was a significant milestone for the Reach project, together with the delivery of the on-line PAYE system in conjunction with the Revenue Commissioners.

The Department, through its Central Identity Services, provides a key element of the Reach service. The Department is also involved in the development of proposals for a new Public Service Card under the Standard Authentication Framework Environment (SAFE) project and this project was also progressed.

→ Development of new Irish National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion

Considerable progress was made during 2006 on the development of the new plan to be launched in early 2007 to cover the period 2007-2016 and to complement the new National Development Plan (2007-2013) TRANSFORMING IRELAND *A Better Quality of Life for All*. These strategies build on the life cycle approach outlined in the new national partnership agreement, *Towards 2016*, by assessing the risks which individuals face at each stage of the lifecycle and the supports they need to meet these risks. The groups focussed on using this approach are Children, People of Working

Age, Older People and People with Disabilities. This strategic framework is also being designed to create more coherent and integrated structures to achieve more effective implementation. It will also facilitate a better and a more effective reporting and monitoring process across the spectrum of government activity in the area of social inclusion.

A key input to the National Plan was the conclusions emerging from the annual NAPS Social Inclusion Forum which was held on 15 February 2006 in the Royal Hospital Kilmainham and was attended by approximately 300 participants from the voluntary and community sector, the statutory sector, local representatives, and members of the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF). This meeting had a particular focus on the development of the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion (NAPinclusion).

→ Actuarial Review of PRSI

The second Actuarial Review of the Social Insurance Fund commenced in October, 2006, and it is expected that the final Report will be published during the summer of 2007. The focus of this Review is to project the income of the Fund (including the accumulated surplus) as well as the contributory pensions and benefits paid from the Fund – including non-cash benefits (household benefits package) and other payments (redundancy and insolvency payments). The period covered by this Review will be 55 years (from 2006 to 2061).

→ Processing times

The Department is committed to delivering a high quality customer service to all its customers. This includes ensuring that applications are processed and that decisions on entitlement are issued as quickly as possible having regard to the eligibility conditions that apply. These conditions vary from scheme to scheme and may include establishment of a customer's social insurance record, the provision of medical evidence, verification of identity, satisfying residency conditions and an assessment of means where appropriate.

The Department has adopted a set of performance targets in relation to claim processing and these are set out in our customer action plan. During 2006 the relevant targets were met or exceeded in 9 out of 23 areas and most areas showed an improvement over 2005.

These targets, set some years ago, relate processing times to volumes of claims received. In recent years claim volumes have been exceeded in over 50 per cent of schemes and this has impacted on achievement of targets. There has been an increase in particular in the volume of Child Benefit claims from EU workers. Claims from EU national workers in Ireland with non-resident children have risen from an average of 30 claims per week in 2005 to an average of 300 per week for 2006. This increase in volume combined with the necessary checks with authorities in other EU countries has resulted in significant delays in processing these claims. While factors such as these have impinged on the ability to achieve claim processing targets continuous efforts are made to improve the turnaround times for deciding claims.

CHAPTER 03

THE DEPARTMENT'S GOALS

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→ Goal 1: RETIRED AND OLDER PEOPLE

To ensure adequate, secure and sustainable pensions for retired and older persons and provide additional services in response to changing needs which allow them to maintain a reasonable standard of living on attaining retirement age

→ Goal 2: PEOPLE OF WORKING AGE

To provide income supports and access to relevant services to people of working age who cannot secure an income (or adequate income) from employment and facilitate them in taking up relevant employment, training, education and development opportunities as appropriate

→ Goal 3: CHILDREN

To ensure the well-being of all children through income support that assists with child-rearing costs in general, including those which arise in circumstances of particular need or disadvantage

→ Goal 4: COVERAGE, ACCESS AND ENTITLEMENT

To ensure that the range and level of social security coverage is appropriate to the social and economic circumstances of different groups, that the services for which people are eligible are readily accessible and delivered in an efficient, effective and integrated way, through direct provision to our customers and by supporting agencies in providing services to our customers

→ Goal 5: POVERTY, SOCIAL INCLUSION AND FAMILIES

To support and promote families and to attain better outcomes in tackling poverty and achieving a more inclusive society through co-operating, developing and implementing national anti-poverty strategies, and through the provision of income and other support services for people in debt or at risk of experiencing hardship

→ Goal 6: THE DEPARTMENT AND ITS STAFF

To develop an effective, adaptable and capable organisation and a culture of pride, innovation and performance with a high level of involvement by people at all levels and a climate which fosters personal and career development

CHAPTER 04

GOAL 1: RETIRED AND OLDER PEOPLE

GOAL 1: RETIRED AND OLDER PEOPLE

To ensure adequate, secure and sustainable pensions for retired and older persons and provide additional services in response to changing needs which allow them to maintain a reasonable standard of living on attaining retirement age

At the end of December 2006 approximately 338,000 people were in receipt of retirement or old age pensions while just under 62,000 qualified adults and 3,300 children also benefited. In addition there were almost 1.6 million recipients of the Households Benefit Package (Electricity/Gas Allowance, Free Television Licence and Telephone Allowance) and the Free Travel Pass, the majority of whom were in receipt of pensions for older people.

→ OBJECTIVE 1

Achieve a high level of customer satisfaction by delivering social insurance and assistance pensions and additional services to a high standard.

→ Customer Service

Following the decision that persons on Invalidity Pension would transfer automatically to State Pension (Contributory) (SPC) on reaching age 66, arrangements for migration of Invalidity Pensioners to SPC were completed on schedule in September 2006. Over 9,400 Invalidity Pensioners were transferred to SPC and received their first SPC payment on 29 September 2006. Procedures have been put in place to automatically transfer Invalidity Pensioners that turn 66 years of age to SPC on a weekly basis.

Processing times for pension claims improved on 2005 in a majority of pension categories. For details see Appendix 1 – Status Report on organisational targets.

→ Service Delivery Modernisation Programme

In 2006 the Service Delivery Modernisation (SDM) programme has expanded to encompass Retirement Pension, Old Age Contributory Pension (renamed State Pension (Transition) and State Pension (Contributory) in 2006), Free Travel, Bereavement Grant and the Overpayment and Debt management system.

Some 220,000 existing pensioner customer records were successfully migrated to the SDM system and day-to-day work on pension claim administration is now being processed on the new system.

→ OBJECTIVE 2

Ensure the overall pension system provides a reasonable level of replacement income for retired and older persons and their survivors by:

- (a) Providing adequate and sustainable state pensions and***
- (b) Ensuring extensive, secure and adequate supplementary pension provision, in consultation with the Pensions Board.***

(a) Providing adequate and sustainable State pensions

→ Budget 2007 increases

Budget 2007 (December 2006) provided for pension increases of €16 and €20 for contributory and non-contributory pensions respectively. This brought the maximum rate of payment for the contributory pension to €209.30 per week and the non-contributory payment to €200 per week

and means that the Government commitment to a minimum rate of €200 per week was achieved on schedule. The Budget increases will be introduced from January 2007.

→ Basic income disregard increased

There were significant developments in relation to non-contributory pensions in Budget 2006 with payments for those aged over 66 years being rationalised with the creation of a single State Pension (non contributory). The basic income disregard for means test purposes was also increased (for the first time in many years) to €20 per week and an earnings disregard of €100 per week was also introduced. The latter is intended to assist and encourage older people who may be considering continuing in employment after normal retirement age. Budget 2007 made further increases in these allowances with the basic disregard moving to €30 per week and the earnings disregard to €200.

→ Increase for Qualified Adult (QA)

Increases for qualified adults were increased by €23.70 in Budget 2007 in pursuit of the Government commitment to align these increases with the maximum rate of the State Pension (non-contributory). This brings the payment for a qualified adult aged 66 and over to about 86% of the target. This process is to be completed within 3 years. Changes in legislation were also announced which will enable a qualified adult to receive that portion of the pension directly. The Budget also provided for an increase of €10.70 per week for State Pension (Contributory), State Pension (Transition) Qualified Adults (QAs) aged under 66 while State Pension (Non-Contributory) QAs received an increase of €11.90. Proportionate increases in reduced rates of QA payment were also announced. From September 2007, the increase for a Qualified Adult will be paid directly to the Qualified Adult for the duration of entitlement of a State Pensioner.

→ Pensioners and Rent & Mortgage Interest Supplement

From January 2007, pensioners aged 66 or over who are in receipt of rent or mortgage interest supplement under the Supplementary Welfare Allowance Scheme are allowed to retain any additional amount of pension they receive which is in excess of the Supplementary Welfare Allowance rate.

(b) Ensuring extensive, secure and adequate supplementary pension provision, in consultation with the Pensions Board

→ National Pensions Review

Results from the CSO Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) for Quarter 4 2005 showed that the rate of supplementary pensions coverage had increased to 55% of those at work. Up to the end of December 2006, over 95,000 PRSA accounts had been opened with a total asset value of €835 million.

Given the slow progress being made towards overall supplementary pension coverage targets, in February 2005 the Minister requested the Pensions Board to commence a review of the overall pension strategy and its report was published in January 2006. In general, the report favoured a continuation of the voluntary system of supplementary pensions with improved incentives. The Minister subsequently asked the Pensions Board to report on a model of mandatory provision which could be considered if it were decided this was the appropriate course for future policy. The report was published in August 2006.

Pension issues were to the fore in the negotiations on the social partnership agreement Towards 2016. As part of the final agreement the Government is, inter alia, committed to producing a Green Paper on pensions, which will be published in 2007. Following publication, a consultation process is planned and the

Government is committed to responding to this by producing a framework for long-term pension policy.

→ National Pensions Awareness Campaign

The National Pensions Awareness Campaign was continued by the Pensions Board in 2006, on behalf of the Government, with an extensive campaign which included radio, television and cinema advertising. Resources available for the campaign were increased significantly to provide a more intensive campaign in the run-up to the maturing of SSIA's. The maturing of these accounts is seen as an opportunity to promote pension savings and, in this regard, the Minister for Finance has introduced tax incentives to encourage people to invest part of their SSIA savings in pension schemes.

→ OBJECTIVE 3

Implement relevant national and international legislation.

In 2006 two acts were introduced. These were a) Social Welfare Law Reform and Pensions Act 2006 and b) the Social Welfare Act 2006.

a) The Social Welfare Law Reform and Pensions Act 2006 provided for a number of amendments to the Pensions Act 1990 in relation to occupational pensions.

Amendments to the Pensions Act included the provision for an alternative to the prosecution of an offence under the Act by providing for an on-the-spot fine regime. In addition, the Act provided the Minister with powers to make Regulations so that trustees of a defined contribution scheme must prepare a Statement of Reasonable Projection at specified intervals, in accordance with guidance issued by the Society of Actuaries of Ireland. The Act provided that trustees of a

scheme may, in certain circumstances, without the member's consent, effect a transfer to a PRSA instead of providing a preserved benefit, while trustees of certain schemes in wind-up will be required to produce an annual report. Finally, the Act provided for Regulations to be made for the review of work carried out by a scheme actuary, and amended the functions of the Pensions Ombudsman in relation to the operation of the Internal Resolutions Dispute (IDR) procedure.

In addition to the four commencement orders that were signed by the Minister to give effect to the provisions of the Social Welfare Law Reform and Pensions Act 2006, seven further regulations in relation to occupational pensions were promulgated in 2006. These regulations expanded on the provisions of the Pensions Act in relation to the disclosure of information requirements, the powers of the Pensions Ombudsman, and provisions in relation to cross-border schemes which implement the EU Directive on the supervision of Institutions for Occupational Retirement Provision, known as the IORPs Directive.

During 2006, officials from the Department participated in the EU working group on the draft pension directive of the European Parliament and Council on improving the portability of supplementary pension rights, discussions on which are still ongoing.

b) Social Welfare Act 2006

The Social Welfare Act provides for the Budget increases in the rates of social insurance and social assistance payments and improvements in Family Income Supplement, Maternity and Adoptive Benefit, Death Benefit Funeral Expenses Grant, Bereavement Grant, Widowed Parent Grant, State Pension (Non-Contributory) and Disability Allowance schemes.

It also provides for raising the weekly earnings limit at which PRSI becomes payable, an increase in the income ceiling above which PRSI contributions are not payable by employed or optional contributors, as announced in the Budget, in addition to changes to the Health Contributions Act 1979 to provide for an increase

in the amount of contributions payable for earnings over a certain threshold. It also provides for an increase in the weekly and annual exemption thresholds for the Health Contribution Levy.

This ensures that Free Travel pass holders can travel free of charge on these services.

See Appendix 4 for details of the entire legislative programme.

→ OBJECTIVE 4

Simplify the regulatory environment in which occupational/personal pensions operate.

The Department is involved in ongoing consultation with the Pensions Board in relation to both the primary and secondary legislation governing occupational and personal pensions and facilitates amendments to this legislation, where required.

→ OBJECTIVE 5

Review and develop the opportunities for improved service to customers of Household Benefits Package and Free Travel.

The Household Benefits package, which comprises the Electricity/Gas Allowance, Telephone Allowance and free Lifetime Television Licence is available to people living permanently in the State who satisfy specific qualifying criteria. The current administrative arrangements for payment of the Household Benefits package were designed for a relationship with a single provider per utility market and will need to be reviewed as Ireland moves to a deregulated energy market environment with multiple service providers. The service on the Free Travel scheme was significantly improved from September 2006 with the removal of peak travel time access restrictions applied on Dublin Bus and Bus Éireann provincial city services in Cork and Limerick. During 2006 discussions took place between officials of the Department and the Department of Regional Development in Northern Ireland on the implementation of an All Ireland Free Travel Scheme for pensioners which commences in 2007. The Department contributed €850,000 in 2006 towards the Rural Transport Initiative operated by POBAL on behalf of the Department of Transport.

CHAPTER 05

GOAL 2: PEOPLE OF WORKING AGE

GOAL 2: PEOPLE OF WORKING AGE

To provide income supports and access to relevant services to people of working age who cannot secure an income (or adequate income) from employment and facilitate them in taking up relevant employment, training, education and development opportunities as appropriate.

The Labour Force increased by almost 82,900 to 2,154,800 (Quarter 4, 2006) and accounted for 63% of all persons aged 15 and over compared with 62% in Quarter 4, 2005.

The average Live Register (LR) for 2006 was 157,398. This compares with 157,117 for 2005.

The LR at the beginning of January 2006 was 155,833 and by the end of December 2006 it had decreased to 155,389.

At the end of 2006 approximately half a million people of working age were in receipt of payments from the Department. These were paid mainly in respect of unemployment, pre-retirement, disability and invalidity, employment supports and one-parent families. In addition, this Department has a range of supports available to assist customers of working age back into employment, education and training. (See appendix to this chapter for examples of supports.)

→ OBJECTIVE 1

Achieve a high level of customer satisfaction by delivering social insurance and assistance payments and additional services to a high standard.

Customer service developments in the delivery of social insurance and assistance payments included the following:

Lunchtime Opening

At the end of December a total of 41 local offices, out of a total of 58, were providing the full range of services (excluding claim certification) to the public between 9.30 am and 4.00 pm including lunchtime.

Claim authorisation

Illness Benefit (IB) Branch continued to afford priority in claim processing to those employees who are not paid while out of work because of illness and who had no other source of income. The turnaround target of 30% of new claims in 3 days was exceeded in 2006 with an average performance of 35.66%, which is an increase of over 3% on 2005.

Work continues on contacting suitable long-term IB customers advising them of their potential entitlement to Invalidity Pension.

→ OBJECTIVE 2

Develop specific social welfare schemes for people of working age to ensure that they have an adequate, secure and sustainable income and related supports.

→ Budget provisions

The following are some of the provisions of Budget 2006 which affected people of working age.

An increase of €20.00 per week was provided for in the personal rate payable to recipients of the various social welfare schemes for persons of working age. This brought the level of the lowest rate of payment to €185.80 per week, thereby fulfilling the Government commitment to achieve a rate of €150 per week, in 2002 terms, by 2007. The weekly rates of Increase for Qualified Adult for recipients of most working age schemes increased by €13.30 per week.

→ Maternity Benefit

Maternity Leave – and thus Maternity Benefit payments – was extended from 18 to 22 weeks

with effect from 1 March 2006, with a further 4 weeks of unpaid statutory leave also available. The rate of Maternity Benefit was also increased from 75% to 80% of reckonable earnings

→ Improved conditions for Disability Allowance (DA)

As part of Budget 2007, the disqualification for DA of persons in residential care has been removed so that all persons in residential care will have an income maintenance payment on the same basis, in effect abolishing the disqualification and the partial Disability Allowance payment. The removal of the disqualification will ensure that persons in receipt of DA in residential care are treated in the same way as other social welfare recipients.

→ OBJECTIVE 3

Engage meaningfully with persons of working age, particularly marginalised and excluded groups, and provide services directly and in cooperation with other relevant agencies to encourage and support these people in taking up relevant work, training, education or development opportunities.

→ Employment Action Plan (EAP)

The national Employment Action Plan (EAP), adopted by the Government under the European Employment Guidelines, included a commitment to more systematic engagement of the employment services with the unemployed.

Under the EAP, persons in receipt of Jobseekers Benefit or Jobseekers Allowance (JSA/JSB), who reach various duration thresholds on the Live Register, are identified by the Department of Social & Family Affairs and referred to FÁS for interview with a view to job placement or offer of training.

The EAP has been implemented on a phased basis since September 1998. There were 54,362 referrals to FÁS under the EAP in 2006, involving 46,048

individuals. Of those referred under EAP in 2006, 23,182 had left the Live Register by the end of the year. During the year FÁS placed 15,645 in jobs, training or education.

During 2006 the EAP was extended to those aged between 55 and 64 years and the first selection of customers in this age category commenced with effect from the 1st weekend of July 2006. Labour market reforms, proposed by the European Council under the Lisbon Strategy include a target employment rate of 10% for those aged 55 years and over, by 2010. The involvement of the over-55s in the EAP is intended to facilitate an increase in the rate of return to the workforce for this age group.

The Government decided in 2006, in line with commitments given in *Towards 2016*, to reduce the duration for selection into the EAP from 6 months on the Live Register to 3 months. Referral at 3 months commenced from 16 October 2006.

→ Supports for customers

In addition to the Employment Action Plan there are other supports available directly from the Department, which are designed to assist customers of the Department, particularly marginalised and excluded groups. These include the provision of services directly and in co-operation with other relevant agencies to encourage and support people in taking up relevant work, training, education or development opportunities.

The following allowances, grants and projects continued to assist those of working age to access the labour market in 2006:

* Back To Education Allowance (BTEA):

The Back to Education Allowance is designed to encourage and facilitate people who are welfare dependant to improve their skills and qualifications and therefore their prospects of returning to the active labour force.

As part of Budget 2006, periods spent in receipt of Supplementary Welfare Allowance or Direct Provision of accommodation count towards the qualifying period for Back to Education Allowance provided that the applicant establishes an entitlement to a relevant Social Welfare payment prior to commencing on the scheme. This change was effective from September 2006.

There are two education options available under the scheme – a second level option and a third level option.

The number of people in receipt of Back to Education Allowance during 2005/2006 academic year was:

Second Level Option:	2,975
Third Level Option:	4,310
Total	7,285

The Report of a review group on the BTEA Scheme was published in 2005. The Department, having examined the recommendations in the report, is working to implement them in conjunction with the Department of Education and Science.

* Back to Work Allowance Scheme

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 return to the active labour force. There are two strands to the scheme, the Back to Work Allowance for employees and the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance for self-employed. The scheme allows participants to retain a reducing proportion of their social welfare payment plus secondary benefits over three or four years respectively.

The scheme has remained under review to ensure that it continues to be relevant to the prevailing labour market and economic climate. In Budget 2006 the qualifying period for access to both strands of the scheme from Job Seeker's Allowance and Job Seeker's Benefit was reduced to 2 years. In addition from September 2006, periods spent on Supplementary Welfare

Allowance and Direct Provision accommodation count towards the qualifying period for Back to Work Allowance provided that the applicant establishes an entitlement to a relevant Social Welfare payment prior to commencing on the scheme.

The number of people in receipt of Back to Work Allowance at the end of December 2006 was:

BTW (employee)	3,963
BTW (self-employed)	4,373
Total	8,336

* Technical Assistance and Training Grants (TATs):

Potential Back to Work Allowance recipients setting up business may receive financial assistance in relation to the following: financial projections and business accounts, preparing business plan, market research, start your own business course, computer training etc. Assistance is also available towards the cost of public liability insurance. Potential BTW recipients (employees) may also be assisted financially with preparation for interviews, CVs and computer skills training.

During 2006, 3,657 grants amounting to €2,199,212 were advanced through this fund.

* PRSI Exemption Scheme

The Employer's PRSI Exemption scheme is a support available to employers to assist them in matching their labour needs with those of unemployed jobseekers. The scheme exempts employers from their share of the PRSI contribution in respect of workers for the first two years of their employment.

The highest number of applications was received from the following employment categories: general operatives/ labourer, clerical/ administration and retail.

During 2006, 819 applications were approved under this initiative.

* Grants towards the Development and Promotion of Second Chance Education Opportunities:

This grant Scheme is designed to assist programmes, projects and initiatives that provide second-chance education opportunities to long-term unemployed people and other disadvantaged groups. The overall objective is to encourage those target groups to return to education and training as a means of improving their educational qualifications with a view to returning to the labour force.

Expenditure from the fund in 2006 totalled €260,458.

→ Policy Developments

The following developments, which will have positive implications for unemployed people, took place in 2006:

* Activation

A working group was set up to review existing activation measures and put forward proposals for the continued development of policy having regard to the Department's Strategy Statement - *Security with Opportunity* - and the NESC report No 113 - *The Developmental Welfare State*.

The working group reported in July 2006. The group documented the range of interventions currently in place within the Department; identified gaps in the services provided and put forward recommendations for the development and expansion of activation programmes in the future.

As part of the ten-year framework social partnership Agreement 2006-2016 - *Towards 2016* - the Government and the social partners recognised that employment is a major factor for people exiting out of poverty and that it also influences quality of life and social well-being. The agreement committed to a greater focus on activation and provides for the introduction of an active case management service for social welfare customers of working age, including collaboration to ensure that customers, agencies and service

providers in this area engage actively with each other. This will place activation on a level with service delivery and control as a central part of the core business of the Department.

Implementation of this commitment has been supported in the National Development Plan 2007- 2013 - *TRANSFORMING IRELAND A Better Quality of Life for All* - launched in January 2007

* Profiling of Unemployed Customers

In September 2006 a major national study into the factors which influence a person's employability was commenced. This study will build on previous research conducted by the Department in conjunction with the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI). The aim of the research is to develop a profiling model which will predict how long each person joining the Live Register is likely to be unemployed.

Information was gathered from over 40,000 customers, nationwide, who joined the Live Register in the 13 week period to 8 December, 2006. The study will take almost two years to complete.

Profiling has the potential to identify those joining the Live Register who are likely to become long-term unemployed and thus facilitate early, targeted interventions with this group, rather than providing interventions to those who are likely to find work in any event.

The benefits of a National Customer Profiling System would include:-

- More efficient and effective focusing of resources on those who need most support in accessing employment.
- Earlier intervention with those who need it.
- Reduction in the length of time a person is unemployed; improving the possibility of obtaining sustainable employment and not returning to unemployment in the future.
- Prevention of long-term unemployment; avoiding the social, financial, health and other associated impacts.
- Reduction in programme costs.

This project has been developed and is being co-ordinated by the Department's Western Regional Office in Galway.

* Family Income Supplement (FIS) Campaign

As a result of increased income limits provided in Budget 2006, a national advertising campaign to promote and encourage people to apply for FIS took place in March 2006. In 2006 the section received 33,051 applications compared with 22,744 in 2005 (an increase of over 45%). New or first time applications alone in 2006 were 13,591 compared to 7,781 in 2005. This increase is largely attributable to the advertising campaign.

* Supporting Lone Parents

One of the key tasks in the *Ending Child Poverty* initiative under Sustaining Progress is to address obstacles to employment for lone parents.

The Senior Officials Group on Social Inclusion was mandated late in 2004 to examine the issue and report back to the Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion with specific proposals. A sub-group of the Senior Officials Group, chaired by the Department of the Taoiseach, with a secretariat provided by DSFA, was set up to examine the obstacles to employment for lone parents, with particular emphasis on income supports, employment, education, childcare and support programmes and information. A Departmental Working Group was also established to review the income support arrangements for lone parents, looking at issues including the contingency basis of the one parent family payment, cohabitation and the fact that the payment can act as a disincentive to the formation of partnerships and discourage joint parenting.

Both reports were published jointly in March as a Government discussion paper *Proposals for Supporting Lone Parents*. The report put forward proposals for the expanded availability and range of education and training opportunities for lone parents; the extension of the National Employment Action Plan to focus on lone

parents; focused provision of childcare; improved information services for lone parents and the introduction of a new social assistance payment for low income families with young children. The paper also proposed the abolition of the cohabitation rule as a condition for receipt of the proposed social assistance payment.

Publication was followed by a consultation process with representative groups and other interested parties.

The Senior Officials Group on Social Inclusion is currently developing an implementation plan to progress the non-income recommendations such as childcare support, education, training and activation measures.

The development of the details of a new social assistance payment to replace the One Parent Family Payment is currently underway and will have the long term aim of assisting people to achieve financial independence through supporting them to enter education, training and employment. **See Goal 3, objective 3.**

* Supporting people with disabilities

A multi-agency project initiated in September 2005 was completed in 2006. The objectives of the project were, to provide an integrated point of contact for people with disabilities with a multi agency assessment of training needs and employment potential and to assist people with disabilities to progress to employment and other opportunities. Preliminary research involved one to one consultations with young people (aged 16 to 25 years) in receipt of Disability Allowance in counties Longford, Offaly and Westmeath. The findings of the project will inform the development of measures by the Department to assist people with disabilities in maximising participation in social and economic life.

→ OBJECTIVE 4

Ensure income supports and associated secondary benefits do not create financial barriers to seeking, accepting or improving employment.

→ Work Incentives

A number of enhancements, announced in Budget 2007, were designed to facilitate and incentivise entry or re-entry into the workforce. In addition, the elimination of unnecessary complexities within and across schemes and the simplification of means testing from an internal and external customer service perspective was an overriding objective. The measures included:

- The introduction of a daily earnings disregard of €20 per day for Jobseeker's Allowance and Farm Assist claimants with children (for up to 3 days a week).
- An increase in the daily earnings disregard by €7.30 per day, from €12.70 to €20, for Jobseeker's Allowance and Farm Assist claimants without children. Both of these measures are designed to reward work and standardises the application of the disregard across family types.
- The reform and simplification of the assessment of spouse's earnings for Jobseeker's Allowance/ PRETA/ Disability Allowance / Farm Assist so as to reward work were announced in Budget 2007. The changes announced will involve the abolition of tapered rates increases for Qualified Adults for these schemes and the simplification of the assessment of means where a spouse takes up employment so as to ensure that existing poverty traps (at certain income levels) are eliminated.
- The increase in the upper income threshold for One Parent Family Payment by €25 a week to €400 a week.
- The increase of the earnings-related reduced rates of Deserted Wife's Benefit to the maximum personal rate subject to a qualifying income threshold of €20,000 and also introducing a transitional payment of half-rate Deserted Wife's Benefit for 6 months where a recipient exceeds that income threshold.

- The threshold of spouse's income for entitlement to half rate Qualified Child Increase (QCI) with Jobseeker's Benefit, Illness Benefit, Injury Benefit and Health & Safety Benefit to increase by €50 per week, from €350 to €400.
- Enabling recipients of Rent Supplement, who have been placed on a Local Authority waiting list for accommodation under the Rental Accommodation Scheme, to take up full time employment and remain eligible for Rent Supplement, subject to satisfying the other conditions for entitlement.
- The capital disregard for entitlement to Rent & Mortgage Interest Supplement and Supplementary Welfare Allowance was increased from €520 to €5,000 in line with arrangements for other schemes.

→ Improvements in work incentives for people with disabilities

The Department's Disability Sectoral Plan under the Disability Act, 2005 was published in July 2006 and approved by both Houses of the Oireachtas in October 2006.

The plan was informed by a comprehensive consultation process with the Disability sector through the Disability Legislation Consultation Group, the National Disability Authority and the Department's Disability Consultative Forum. A number of written and oral submissions were also received. The Department will continue to consult with the Disability Consultative Forum with regard to the progressive implementation of the sectoral plan.

A central commitment in the plan over the period 2007 to 2013 is the development of a systematic programme of engagement for all people of working age, specifically including people with disabilities, to maximise opportunities for self development, employability and labour market opportunity. Policy objectives include extending eligibility and addressing benefit traps and disincentives within the structure of social welfare disability schemes.

Initiatives introduced in 2006 under this heading include:

- improvements in the earnings disregard, from June 2006, for people receiving Disability Allowance or Blind Pension;
- the abolition, in September 2006, of peak-hour restrictions on the use of the Free Travel Pass. The result is that people with disabilities may now use their passes going to work or attending educational, rehabilitative and therapeutic courses that are, very often, central to improving their lifestyles

→ OBJECTIVE 5

Ensure that payments and supports to carers are efficient and effective, recognising their needs and adequately addressing poverty and social exclusion and are adaptable to the needs of carers in a changing care environment.

The Government and the social partners recognise the importance of helping families to balance their work responsibilities with their family, caring and other commitments and acknowledge, in particular, the important role played by family carers.

The social partnership agreement, *Towards 2016*, negotiated and ratified in 2006, recognises the importance of helping families to balance their work responsibilities with their family, caring and other commitments. The important role played by family carers is particularly acknowledged. The agreement contains priority actions which are being addressed in a budgetary context as detailed below.

In Budget 2007, the income disregard for Carer's Allowance was increased by €30 from €290 to €320 per week for a single person and by €60 from €580 to €640 for a couple. This increase will take effect in April 2007 and will mean that both this commitment in *Towards 2016* and the commitment in *An Agreed Programme for Government* with regard to keeping the level of the disregard in line with average earnings have been exceeded.

In Budget 2007, it was announced that a new payment equivalent to half the Carer's Allowance would be paid to certain people with another social welfare entitlement. Under the new arrangements, people in receipt of certain other social welfare payments, such as the State Pension (Contributory), who are also providing full time care and attention to a person, will be able to retain their main welfare payment and receive another payment, depending on their means, the maximum of which will be the equivalent of a half rate Carer's Allowance. The precise details regarding how this new arrangement will operate are being examined and will be set out in legislation in early 2007. The measure will come into effect in September 2007.

The Department, in the context of its *Sectoral Plan under the Disability Act 2005* is working with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and FÁS to progress issues associated with training for carers. The Department is leading the development of a structured consultation process to inform future policy in this area. This will involve an annual meeting of carer representative groups and relevant Departments and agencies. The first such consultation meeting was held in November 2006. Eleven representative groups and eight departments/agencies were represented at the meeting.

→ Increased payments to carers

Provision was made in Budget 2007 for the following increases in the weekly rates of payment to carers which took effect on 1 January 2007.

- the rate of Carer's Benefit increased by €20.00 from €180.70 to €200.70 per week, an increase of 11.1%,
- the rate of Carer's Allowance increased by €20.00 or 11.1% to €200 per week for a carer under age 66, and
- the rate for carers over age 66 increased by €18.00 to €218.70 per week, an increase of 9%.

→ Definition of “full time care and attention”

Budget 2006 eased the definition of full time care and attention for the purposes of Carer's Allowance, Carer's Benefit and Respite Care Grant. With effect from June 2006, the number of hours for which a carer can engage in employment, self employment or training/education and still be considered to be providing full time care and attention for the purposes of these schemes was increased from 10 to 15 hours per week.

Government for consideration and influenced the developments announced, both in the health and social welfare areas, in Budget 2006 and 2007, and also in the national partnership agreement *Towards 2016*.

→ Respite Care

In Budget 2006, the level of the respite care grant was increased to €1,200 from June 2006. Provision was made in Budget 2007 to increase the grant by €300 to €1,500 from June 2007. This will be paid in respect of each care recipient. This payment is made in June each year to all carers, who are providing full-time care to an older person or a person with a disability, regardless of their means or the social welfare payment they receive. Approximately 34,300 carers, including those in receipt of Carer's Allowance and Benefit received a Respite Care Grant in 2006 and applications continue to be received. Of this number, approximately 8,000 carers are not in receipt of a weekly social welfare carer's payment.

→ OBJECTIVE 6

Ensure that a strategy regarding the financing of long-term care is developed.

→ Long-term Care Working Group

A working group, chaired by the Department of the Taoiseach and comprising officials from the Departments of Finance, Health and Children and Social and Family Affairs, was established in January 2005. The objective of this Group was to identify the basic policy options for a financially sustainable system of long term care, taking account of the various reports and consultations that have taken place in this area. The report of the working group was submitted to the

→ Appendix to Chapter 5

→ Developments under the Special Projects Fund

The special projects fund allows the Department of Social and Family Affairs an opportunity to impact on social inclusion and improve employability in a very positive way. These projects have given much help by way of intensive training, counselling and other supports to groups at risk of developing long-term welfare dependency.

The special projects initiative demonstrates the positive results of a partnership approach between the Department, the Voluntary & Community Sector and other local players in identifying and addressing local needs in terms of training and development.

The groups who need special help of this type include the very long-term unemployed, travellers, people with literacy difficulties, lone parents, the long-term ill and people with disabilities. Some of the projects supported include personal development, computer training and 'start your own business' courses.

From January to December 2006, over 160 projects were funded at a total cost of €2.9 million.

Some examples of projects funded under the Special Projects Fund in 2006 follow:

* Job Seeking & Communication Skills Programme for the Young Unemployed in Cork City

This programme was targeted at 18 year olds on the Live Register. Most of the participants had completed the Leaving Certificate but had little or no direction since leaving school. Some would have come from a background of long-term unemployment.

The programme was delivered to 18 participants over two mornings a week for a period of twelve weeks and was completed in September 2006. Social and Job Seeking Skills, Computers and Career

Planning formed the basis of the course. The aim of the programme was to encourage the participants to focus on their long term future rather than the short term.

By the end of the course all of the participants had completed a CV. Each participant had a career plan which laid out the skills they have, areas they might wish to seek employment and suggested stages of how they might get there. Many of the participants chose to return to education as a way of moving forward in their careers.

* Inroads Programme for Lone Parents in Ballyfermot, Dublin

This was a personal development, career guidance and counselling programme focused on young very vulnerable lone parents. The objective was to bring the participants to the point where they could access mainstream education, training or employment. Fourteen participants were recruited through contact with front line services such as Public Health nurses and Home School Liaison staff. The Ballyfermot Social Intervention Initiative arranged childcare and provided general administration for the programme.

Initially participants had very little self-confidence, no interest in returning to education and felt a sense of isolation. Apart from the personal development and confidence building elements, a very worthwhile feature of the programme were the field visits to a number of colleges. By the end of the ten week programme most participants had committed to returning to complete their education.

The programme succeeded in addressing barriers to participation for this target group in a number of ways: for example, by providing adequate childcare and by providing transport from surrounding estates to the training centre.

A follow-on ten week programme with ten participants was completed in June. This programme was designed to dovetail with mainstream education provision and this was facilitated by Inchicore College of Further Education who provided a return to education feeder

programme for the group. Weekly support and additional development work was provided by the Inroads Facilitator and this support was critical to help participants integrate with the more formal education system.

In the autumn nine participants commenced full-time Return to Education programmes. In the twelve month period the participants have progressed from being very vulnerable and isolated to being empowered to return to full-time education and have a clear and positive outlook for their own future and that of their children.

*** Donegal Adult Learner Guidance Service (DALGS)**

The Donegal Adult Learner Guidance Service (DALGS) is part of Donegal Vocational Education Services. Since its inception, the Department has been represented on the inter-agency steering group of DALGS.

DALGS has two purpose designed guidance centres in Letterkenny and Donegal Town from which guidance services are delivered. The vast majority of clients accessing the service are DSFA customers.

DALGS focuses on the needs of the individual and offers both one-to-one services and group guidance services.

The service has proved very useful in the delivery of the Departments Social & Family Support Service strategy of customer progression by appropriate referral to the relevant training and educational bodies in the North West Region. DALGS has also delivered several sessions directly to the Departments customers as part of their Winning New Opportunities personal exploration programme.

CHAPTER 06

GOAL 3: CHILDREN

GOAL 3: CHILDREN

To ensure the well-being of all children through income support that assists with child-rearing costs in general, including those which arise in circumstances of particular need or disadvantage

Child Benefit (CB) is made each month to parents or guardians in respect of each qualified child.

By December 2006 there were 562,860 recipients of Child Benefit in respect of 1.1 million children.

In addition, children benefited from various other payments – see Objective 2 (below). Family Income Supplement (FIS), which is paid weekly to families, including lone-parent families on low pay, was paid to 21,800 families in respect of almost 44,000 children.

→ OBJECTIVE 1

Achieve a high level of customer satisfaction by delivering income support for families and children to a high standard.

→ Customer service

Increase in volume of CB claims from EU workers, particularly for non- resident children.

Child Benefit claims from workers from other EU countries under the provisions of other EU regulations or social security for migrant workers have increased markedly since early 2006.

Claims from such workers in Ireland with non-resident children have risen from an average of 30 claims per week in 2005 to an average of 300 per week for 2006. Claims in respect of resident children of such workers have risen from 150 per week to 300 per week over the same period in 2006 compared to 2005.

This increase in volume, combined with the necessary checks with authorities in other EU countries, resulted in significant delays in processing these claims.

→ OBJECTIVE 2

Ensure the range of income support schemes for families and children provides adequate help in circumstances of particular need or disadvantage.

Budget 2006 made provision for improvements in the various payments in respect of children and families. These improvements were provided for in the Social Welfare Act 2005 and came into effect from January 2006 onwards. In addition, the following increases were announced in the 2007 Budget - for implementation dates see Appendix 2.

→ Child Benefit (CB)

The lower and higher CB rates were increased by €10 per month to new monthly rates of €160 and €195 per month respectively.

→ Qualified Child Increase (QCI)

The rate of QCI was increased by €5.20, €2.70 and €0.40 from €16.80, €19.30 and €21.60, respectively, to a new single rate of €22 per week.

→ Family Income Supplement (FIS)

All FIS earnings thresholds were increased by amounts ranging from €15 to €185 per week, depending on family size.

→ Back to school clothing and footwear allowance (BTSCFA)

Increases to the rate of payment of BTSCFA of €60 per child for the lower rate and €95 per child for the higher rate were introduced bringing the new rates to €180 for children aged 2 to 11 years old and €285 for children aged 12 to 22.

→ School Meals

Additional funding was made available to extend the School Meals Programme to a further 215 schools in the *Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS)* programme.

→ Supplementary Welfare Allowance/Rent Mortgage Interest Supplement

Guardian's Payment (Contributory & Non-Contributory) is disregarded from assessment for Supplementary Welfare Allowance/Rent Mortgage Interest Supplement.

→ Qualified Child Increase (QCI) Jobseekers Benefit

The spouse's income threshold for entitlement to a half rate QCI was increased by €50 per week, from €350 to €400

→ Widowed Parent Grant

The Widowed Parent Grant was increased by €1,300, from €2,700 to €4,000.

→ Introduction of Early Childcare Supplement

The Early Childcare Supplement Scheme was introduced from April 2006. Children under 6 years of age who qualify for Child Benefit are also entitled to a quarterly payment of €250 under this scheme.

The scheme is under the remit of the Office of the Minister for Children but is administered by the Child Benefit office. The first payment issued in August for the quarter April, May and June with payments in October and December covering the remainder of 2006. An average of 275,000 families with a total of 385,000 children, received the payment each quarter during 2006 at a total cost of €290 million.

→ Child-minders: social insurance

A new tax relief in respect of child-minding was introduced in Budget 2006. This scheme allows an individual to supervise up to three children

in his or her home and exempts all related child-minding earnings – up to a maximum ceiling of €10,000 per annum – from taxation. Legislation was enacted to provide that a reduced fixed-rate social insurance contribution of €253 per annum for self-employed home-based child-minders would apply to this income, giving coverage for pensions and maternity benefit.

→ OBJECTIVE 3

Improve the level of information available about the circumstances of children in families in order to better inform policymaking in the area of child poverty.

→ National Longitudinal Study of Children.

The National Longitudinal Study of Children (NLSC) is the most significant of its kind to be undertaken in this country, particularly in terms of the cost, scope and length of the study period. 10,000 nine-month old children and 8,000 children aged nine are to be recruited to participate in the study. The aim of the 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. Work on the study – to be known as *Growing-Up in Ireland* - commenced in April 2006.

The study is overseen by a Project Team comprising officials from the Office for the Minister for Children, the Department of Social and Family Affairs and the Central Statistics Office and a Steering Group was established, chaired by the Office of the Minister for Children, and including senior officials from the Departments of Social and Family Affairs and Education & Science and the Central Statistics Office to provide strategic oversight for the project and sign off on all major components of the Study.

→ Ending Child Poverty Special Initiative

See also Goal 2, objective 3 - Supporting Lone Parents.

The Office for Social Inclusion (OSI) had lead responsibility for progressing the Ending Child Poverty Special Initiative - one of eight special initiatives contained in *Sustaining Progress*, the National Social Partnership Agreement.

One of the key tasks in the Ending Child Poverty initiative was to address obstacles to employment for lone parents, whose children are among those most at risk of poverty. Arising from work done in this area by the Senior Officials Group on Social Inclusion and a working group chaired by the OSI, a major Government discussion paper was launched in March 2006. *Proposals for Supporting Lone Parents* puts forward proposals for:

- reform of the income support system for all parents on a low income;
- an expanded availability and range of education and training opportunities;
- the extension of the National Employment Action Plan;
- focused provision of childcare; and
- improved information services.

In September 2006, the OSI submitted the National Report for Ireland - *Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2006-2008* - to the EU Commission. Reducing child poverty is one of the four priority policy objectives in Ireland's National Report. A number of policy measures have been outlined to achieve the goal of reducing child poverty.

Considerable progress was made by the OSI during 2006 on the development of Ireland's new National Action Plan for Social Inclusion which will cover the period 2007-2016. This Plan is based on the lifecycle approach outlined in the new national partnership agreement - *Towards 2016* - and assesses the risks which individuals face at each stage of the lifecycle and the supports they need to meet these risks. Children have been identified as one of the key lifecycle stages in the Plan and a number of high level targets and supporting actions and initiatives have been identified aimed at reducing and ultimately eliminating child poverty in Ireland.

CHAPTER 07

GOAL 4: COVERAGE, ACCESS AND ENTITLEMENT

GOAL 4: COVERAGE, ACCESS AND ENTITLEMENT

To ensure that the range and level of social security coverage is appropriate to the social and economic circumstances of different groups, that the services for which people are eligible are readily accessible and delivered in an efficient, effective and integrated way, through direct provision to our customers and by supporting agencies in providing services to our customers

→ OBJECTIVE 1

Ensure that the coverage of the Pay Related Social Insurance (PRSI) system is appropriate to the respective circumstances of employed, self employed and other categories.

→ The Social Insurance Fund

The surplus in the Social Insurance Fund in 2006 was €669m (provisional outturn) leading to a cumulative surplus of some €3 billion at the end of 2006.

→ Policy Developments

There is a requirement to undertake an actuarial review of the financial condition of the Social Insurance Fund at five-year intervals. The first Actuarial Review was published in October, 2002, and reflected the position of the Social Insurance Fund at the end of 2000.

Arrangements were put in place in 2006 for a further review of the Fund as at 2005. This Review will predict the income of the Fund (including the accumulated surplus) as well as the contributory pensions and benefits paid from the Fund – including non-cash benefits (household benefits package) and other payments (redundancy and insolvency payments). The period covered by this Review will be 55 years (from 2006 to 2061). It is expected that the final Report will be published during the summer of 2007.

→ Pensions for Missionaries / Volunteer Development Workers:

Officials contributed to a Working Group established under the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs to examine issues relating to pension

coverage for Volunteer Development Workers and missionaries with a view to improving their access to contributory pensions. The outcome of the Group's considerations will be considered by the Oireachtas Committee

→ Tax relief for Child-minders – see Goal 3, objective 2.

→ Other PRSI developments

- (1) The annual earnings ceiling was increased by €2,420 from €44,180 to €46,600 with effect from 1 January, 2006, reflecting the normal indexation designed to maintain the real value of the ceiling.
- (2) The PRSI exemption on low earnings was increased from €287 to €300 per week.
- (3) The weekly Health Contribution threshold was raised by €40 from €400 to €440 per week or €22,880 p.a.

→ PRSI Exemptions reviewed

A review of PRSI exemptions for workers employed temporarily in the state was initiated in 2005. During 2006 stakeholders with an interest in the review were invited to make submissions on the issue. The future of the PRSI exemption scheme was also considered in the context of the new regime to apply to employment permits and developments in relation to immigration policy generally. Recommendations will be brought forward in the light of these developments.

→ Bilateral agreement

Work continued in 2006 towards ratifying the revised agreement with the UK, providing for workers moving between Ireland, the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands with a view to bringing it into effect in 2007.

→ OBJECTIVE 2

Ensure effective administration of PRSI-related entitlements.

The Department works closely with the Revenue Commissioners to ensure the quality and timeliness of PRSI data transfers. There is ongoing liaison with Revenue, employers and others to ensure the timely and accurate transfer and update of End of Year (EOY) PRSI data for all employed and self-employed contributors.

The first transfer of employee PRSI data for the 2005 tax year was received from the Revenue Commissioners in August 2006. To end-December 2006, over 2.98 million employee EOY returns were received in the Department. In the case of self employed contributors, transfer of EOY PRSI information for 2004 commenced in February 2006. Payment data were received in respect of 243,146 self employed contributors.

There are ongoing efforts in place to ensure the accurate transfer of PRSI contribution data for recording on the Department's Central Records System (CRS). This includes the use of more precise matching criteria and improved quality of incoming data. In the reporting period over 60,000 employee records, returned for the 2005 tax year, were found to require further clarification, of which 42% were updated/amended by December 2006. The corresponding figure for self employed contributors was 6,349. In addition, during the year a further 30,000 records were amended and validated for the 2003 and 2004 tax years.

Over 10,400 requests for contribution data were received by Central Records in 2006.

→ Improved contribution details from other countries

At EU level, social security co-ordination rules are applied and put into practice through information exchanges between social security institutions of the Member States. This means that, in order to guarantee appropriate and correct protection of the social security rights of mobile citizens, there is a permanent, regular and complex information flow between the Member States. This mainly comprises

information on validity of rights, insurance history, competent social security institutions, identification of the citizen and payment of benefits and contributions.

An EU Technical Commission on Data Processing has, as its main task, the development of channels for routing information between Member States and to develop the use of telematic services for the exchange of data. In 2006, the Department continued to be fully engaged in the work of the EU Technical Commission. This work will continue during 2007. The Department also participated in the development of a new EU website on social security.

→ Secure data exchange

Discussions continued with Australia regarding secure electronic methods for the exchange of pension payment data and a limited trial is now operative.

→ OBJECTIVE 3

Ensure that the rules for entitlement to social assistance payments are appropriate to the circumstances of claimants, are easy to understand and are applied in a fair and consistent manner.

→ Habitual Residence Condition reviewed

An internal review of the operation of the Habitual Residence Condition was completed in 2006 and recommended (inter alia) strengthened liaison with other relevant Departments and Agencies.

→ Means Review Group

A working group was established in late 2005 to examine the means testing arrangements employed by the Department with a particular view to developing proposals for simplification and rationalisation. The Group's deliberations during 2006 fed into Budget 2007 and, in particular, the measures announced therein in relation to the assessment of the earnings from

employment of a claimant or a spouse in the case of working age schemes. It is expected that the Group will issue its report in early 2007.

→ OBJECTIVE 4

Ensure that, for entitlements that are wholly or partly medically based, the arrangements for medical examination and assessment are of a high standard and are applied in a consistent and effective way.

In 2006, over 33,000 medical examinations and 73,000 desk check reviews were carried out.

→ Options for more flexible working arrangements for scheduling and undertaking medical reviews

The function of the Medical Review and Assessment Service (MRAS) unit is to confirm the eligibility for illness, disability and carer schemes, based on medical certification and reports provided by the claimant's medical practitioner, or based on medical examination undertaken by departmental Medical Assessors.

An organisation review of the service commenced in October 2005 and was concluded in April 2006.

The main recommendations in the report related to:

- The future structure of the service including arrangements for the appointment of Medical Assessors and the arrangement of medical assessment centres with a view to maximizing efficiency and providing a better service to customers.
- The development of a computerised case management system to support Medical Assessors, medical certifiers and administrative staff to reduce the current reliance on largely paper-based systems;
- The redesign of business and medical processes, including the development of medical examination protocols and performance management systems for medical assessors and certifiers.

→ OBJECTIVE 5

Deliver (and support the delivery of) a quality, comprehensive and up-to-date information service to internal and external customers, other state agencies and the wider voluntary and community sector.

→ Information Services Strategy

The Department's Information Services Strategy 2003-2006 has as its primary purpose the provision of comprehensive and accurate information in a clear and easily accessible manner to customers, employers, staff and external partners. The following developments took place in this regard:

a) Plain English

In 2006, the Department's "Plain English" policy continued to be applied with the assistance of the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) thus ensuring the use of plain English in all information material to customers.

Information Services are working with NALA to produce a 'style guide' to assist staff when communicating with customers.

b) Service in Irish

Approximately 80% of the main social welfare information leaflets and application forms were translated into Irish at the end of 2006.

c) Advertising

A pro-active approach was taken again in 2006 to advertising the Department's schemes and services. This was done through a mix of national and provincial media, information leaflets, fact sheets, posters, direct mail shots and advertising in over 60 Credit Unions nationwide. LoCall and Freephone services were also used to provide information on new schemes and services at particular times of the year.

A nationwide awareness campaign to promote and encourage take up of the Family Income Supplement (FIS) was undertaken and included advertising on television, on national and local radio and in national and regional papers.

An information campaign to raise awareness of supports for carers was also conducted on television, on national radio and in national and regional newspapers. The campaign promoted Carer's Allowance, Carer's Benefit and the Respite Care Grant.

The Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance was advertised in national and regional newspapers.

These campaigns were supported by the provision of a LoCall helpline which proved very successful.

d) Information Grants

A total of €1,362,000 was allocated to various national organisations and voluntary groups for information dissemination projects to our customers and to address the information needs of emigrants and immigrants.

e) Publications in 2006

A Summary of the findings of a National Independent Customer Survey 2005 - Consulting with our Customers - was published during the year¹. This set out the main findings of the survey, highlighting areas that have improved since the last Independent Survey of 2001 and also highlighting areas that require improvement.

The Guide to Social Welfare Services (SW4) was updated and published in September 2006.

All primary information booklets and forms were updated to reflect budget and other changes.

f) EU Regulations Guidelines

The guidelines on the EU Regulations governing social security for migrant workers were updated and published on the Department's website.

→ OBJECTIVE 6

Promote and develop a strong customer service culture through the Department and the agencies under its aegis and deliver continuous improvement in customer service.

→ Customer Survey

A Customer Survey was carried out of customers in the Department's Disability Benefits² area. The response rate was 58% and overall customer satisfaction rating was 93%. Customer satisfaction rating with the Telephone Enquiry Service was 89%.

→ Customer Charter

The Customer Charter is a statement of the Department's commitments to our customers and the standard of service they can expect from staff members. Performance against Customer Charter standards is set out in Appendix 5.

→ Quality Accreditation

The Department's website again scored highly on an inter-departmental web accessibility survey carried out during 2006.

→ Official and other Languages

All of our primary booklets and forms published in 2006 were sent for translation to Irish. In addition to Irish and English, the Guide to Social Welfare Services (SW4) was translated in to Arabic, Chinese, French, Polish, Portuguese, Spanish, Romanian and Russian.

→ Local Office opening times

At the end of December 2006, 41 of the 58 local offices were open to customers during lunch-hour.

¹ Key findings were included in the Department's report for 2005.

² Renamed Illness Benefit in October 06.

→ OBJECTIVE 7

Provide a satisfactory service in Irish, in line with the requirements under the Official Languages Act.

The requirements of the Official Languages Act 2003 were met in 2006, as required. Staff training continued with emphasis on front-line and Gaeltacht-serving staff. The majority of information leaflets and application forms were made available in Irish. New and replacement signage were produced bilingually.

→ OBJECTIVE 8

Develop the Standard Authentication Framework Environment (SAFE) programme externally and internally and support the development of an identity policy framework for the governance and delivery of identity management services.

Proposals for a registration service have been agreed and the business requirements document for SAFE has been completed. A roadmap outlining the evolution of the Public Services Card has been drafted and preparation of a Request for Tender for the procurement and development of the card is at an advanced stage. The necessary legislation to support the ongoing development of the Department's identity policy was prepared for enactment in 2007.

→ OBJECTIVE 9

Develop and implement efficient and effective customer identity management systems, provide identity management services to external agencies and ensure that security and privacy principles are developed and implemented.

→ Redesign of Central Records System

Initial modelling and prototyping has taken place on redesigning the Department's primary customer database. This project (the Customer Object Development) will redevelop this

system to support continued modernisation of the Department's business with customers, supporting the delivery of services across multiple channels.

Public Service Identity (PSI) services were expanded in 2006 to include support for Revenue's PAYE "on-line" self-service facility in conjunction with Reach. This was in addition to existing support services to General Register Office functions.

→ OBJECTIVE 10

To deliver through the Reach project a standard means of access to public services through the Public Services Broker (PSB).

→ Reach

In 2006, Phase 1 of the Public Services Broker (PSB) infrastructure went into operation.

Phase 1 of the PSB consists of a central integration framework that in turn supports a number of other linked services.

The integration framework is based on a set of standards and guidelines and is implemented in the form of a central messaging hub based on the XML standard. Reach has developed a set of standard transport protocols and connector software to enable public service agencies to connect easily at low cost to the central framework.

→ Inter-agency messaging service

The essence of this service is a secure reliable electronic channel for public service agencies to exchange business "documents" and data with one another. It allows diverse computer systems to exchange data in a standard manner without the need to re-key data, or to build or purchase expensive once-off connector software.

Departments and agencies such as Revenue, Agriculture & Food, Social and Family Affairs, General Register Office, and Central Statistics Office currently use the service. A project to

enable the Garda and the Courts Service to exchange a range of documents is due to go live in 2007.

→ Life events publication service

Agencies subscribe to this service to receive regular updates (daily if required) of life events (births, deaths and marriages) registered with the General Register Office. Where possible, life event notices are validated by DFSA and contain PSI elements such as Personal Public Services Number. Timely notification of deaths allows more efficient updating of payment arrangements with consequent savings in programme funds in the areas concerned. It also means that databases can be kept up to date e.g. death notices are distributed to local authorities so that they can keep the electoral register up to date.

→ Identity management and access control services

This service allows identities to be checked online for other public service agencies. It relies on the DSFA Public Service Identity (PSI) service for online registration of users. Since May 2006, the Reach identity service authenticates the identity of users of the new Revenue Online PAYE 'self-service' channel. Up to the end of 2006, almost 60,000 PAYE taxpayers had registered with reachservices and are managing their PAYE accounts online. A fully featured reachservices Help Desk has been set up to assist and support users requesting help on the telephone and e-mail channels.

The online PAYE service saves Revenue costs associated with telephone, mail or face-to-face contact and provides the customer with a more convenient choice. The identity service is now available to be extended to other agencies.

→ OBJECTIVE 11

Ensure that customers have access to services through a choice of service delivery channels and continue development of the service delivery modernisation plan for delivery of social welfare services.

→ Electronic payments to customers

The Department has extended the range of payment options in recent years. Customers have a wide choice of electronic payment methods, i.e., Electronic Fund Transfer (EFT), by which payment is made directly to the customer's bank account, or by Electronic Information Transfer (EIT) which is made to a post office designated by the customer. Substantial progress was made in 2006 to increase the use of electronic methods of payment for customers, as follows:

- All Social Welfare schemes now have an EFT option;
- Improvements to the design of claim forms facilitate people wishing to opt for electronic payment options continued in 2006
- The introduction of the EFT payment option to Disablement Benefit customers from February 2006.
- The inclusion of an advice slip with Disability Benefit cheques in 2006 informing recipients of the direct payment options.
- 90% of Family Income Supplement (FIS) customers were paid by EFT by the end of 2006
- 57% of families in receipt of Early Childcare Supplement (ECS) are paid by means of EFT and the balance are paid by EIT;
- One Parent Family Payment to customers were moved progressively from Personalised Payable Order Book (PPO) to payment by EIT at post offices throughout 2006
- Arrangements for customers to be paid through their credit unions were concluded in September 2006
- By the end of 2006, 39 % of weekly /monthly payments to customers were being made by EFT, 52% are paid through An Post including over 9% by EIT.

→ OBJECTIVE 12

Modernise and improve the delivery of services to the Department's customers through the development and implementation of agile ICT systems and organisational change programmes.

→ Service Delivery Modernisation Programme (SDM)

The Service Delivery Modernisation programme is a multi – annual programme of work involving the introduction of new technology and the replacement of legacy computer systems. It also involves the redesign of back office systems, business processes, procedures and work practices and the introduction of new organisational structures.

The programme which comprises business, organisation and technical streams is designed to be implemented in self contained phases. Each phase delivers key business benefits, extends the business object model chosen by the Department and strengthens and enhances the underlying technical architecture.

The key business objectives of the programme 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
- delivery of the eGovernment strategy

Each phase of the programme has two main strands -

- **Technical** - development and refinement of the IT infrastructure to provide the foundation for a radically improved and modernised system of service delivery for all social welfare schemes.
- **Business Re-Organisation** - a parallel programme of organisational change to take advantage

of the new technology and information and communication technology (ICT) systems and to deliver efficiencies in business processes and maximize customer service.

The first phase of SDM, which focused on the Child Benefit scheme, was successfully implemented in November 2002.

In 2006 the SDM programme has expanded to encompass Retirement Pension, Old Age Contributory Pension (renamed State Pension (Transition) and State Pension (Contributory) in 2006), Free Travel, Bereavement Grant and Overpayment and Debt management. The programme is being implemented on an incremental basis and will extend to Household Benefits and will provide for the migration of Child Benefit to the new SDM architecture in early 2007. The programme also supported the introduction, in a very short time-span, of the Early Childcare Supplement (ECS). This was successfully implemented in August 2006 when over 270,000 ECS payments were made for the first time. Bereavement Grant was implemented on the SDM system in the Sligo and Longford offices in October 2006 while the Overpayments and Debt Management (ODM) system was implemented in November 2006. A number of significant scheme changes were also implemented on the SDM system in 2006, arising from the implementation of the 2006 Social Welfare Act provisions.

→ OBJECTIVE 13

Ensure access at a local level to a wider range of services and more effective collaboration with other agencies in the delivery of those services.

→ One Parent Family Payment (OPFP)

The programme to devolve OPFP claim processing to local offices continued in 2006. By the end of the year 39 local offices and their associated branch offices were processing new OPFP claims locally. The OPFP claims processed locally account for approximately 90% of the total weekly intake of new OPFP claims nationwide.

→ OBJECTIVE 14

Ensure that error, fraud and abuse are prevented, detected and deterred by implementing effective risk-based controls of all income support and related expenditure.

a) Control Strategy

The Department's control policy aims to keep fraud and abuse to a minimum by promoting control as an essential element of the day-to-day work of the various work areas. A four-pronged approach is taken to the control of schemes namely prevention of fraud and error at the initial claim stage, early detection through effective review of claims in payment, measures to deter fraud and the pursuit and recovery of overpayments.

The introduction of systematic risk analysis of major schemes is now a key element of the approach to tackling fraud and abuse in the social welfare system. Eleven of the Department's major expenditure schemes have been involved in the process to date. In 2006, seven of nine schemes examined in 2003 were revisited, to assess actions that had been taken to deal with the risks identified by the process and two schemes new to the risk assessment process were targeted.

Fraud and error surveys of schemes are undertaken to establish baseline levels of fraud and abuse. In 2006 surveys were carried out on the allocation of PPS Numbers Allocations Process and in Illness Benefit.

These initiatives will facilitate a more focused and targeted approach to control activity.

b) Public Awareness

The Department tries to raise public and staff awareness in combating fraud in a number of ways including publicising the outcomes of court cases in respect of persons transgressing the social welfare code. The Department's policy is to seek recovery of monies received fraudulently or without entitlement and to prosecute those who defrauded the social welfare system and employers who failed to comply with their statutory obligations with regard to social welfare legislation. In 2006, 266 cases were finalised

in court. Press releases are issued detailing the outcomes of the Department's control activity and the outcomes of court prosecutions, where possible, are publicised in the local and national press.

c) Co-operation with other Agencies

An important element, in the process of implementing an effective control policy, is cooperating with other Government departments, state agencies, local authorities, employer groups and trade unions, to ensure that information and best practice is shared, subject to the statutory obligations under Data Protection legalisation. The Department continued to improve links with a number of relevant bodies, both national and international, and participated in a number of committees, which dealt with issues of relevance to control.

d) Computer Systems

Enhancements of the Department's computer systems continue to facilitate a more coordinated, focused and effective approach to control, enabling, inter alia, data from a variety of sources to be cross-checked and potential irregularities isolated and pursued. In particular the checking of commencement of employment notifications from Revenue revealed instances of people working and claiming social welfare benefits/ assistance. All such cases were pursued and where applicable and appropriate, overpaid monies recovered and prosecution action initiated.

e) Identity Fraud

Emphasis continues to be placed on combating identity fraud with a specific focus of ensuring that persons do not use false identities to obtain PPS numbers or to facilitate the fraudulent receipt of social welfare benefits. A combination of training programmes for local staff and internal back-up services contributed to the continued detection of false applications. In 2006 a total of 65 persons were arrested in connection with offences under the Criminal Justice (Theft and Fraud Offences) Act, 2001 by An Garda Síochána for possession of false/forged documents following detection by staff.

f) Debt Recovery

Considerable effort continues to be put into improving the effectiveness of debt recovery measures and pursuit of defaulters. A new Debt Management system was introduced in November 2006 which will deal with overpayments and debt recovery across all schemes.

A process to connect the new system to the Integrated Short Term System (ISTS) will commence in mid-2007.

A review of departmental policies and practices was completed and a new debt management system was developed. The overall goal of the strategy is to maximise debt recovery levels, with due regard to value for money and with particular emphasis on recovery from debtors no longer dependent on welfare payments. The new strategy will be implemented from 2007.

Outcomes

Gross savings from the control activities on scheme payments amounted to €367.952 million in 2006 (see chart below). Some 334,026 claims were reviewed in this process. In addition inspections of employer records identified arrears of PAYE/PRSI amounting to €7.251million.

Savings	€m
Unemployment	123.109
Illness	63.034
OFP	78.251
Pensions	60.062
Child Benefit	17.805
Carers	6.230
PAYE/PRSI	7.251
Others	19.461
TOTAL	375.203

During 2006, a total of 364 cases were forwarded to the Chief State Solicitor's Office (CSSO) for the initiation of court proceedings. This figure includes 16 civil cases. Civil cases are taken to facilitate (i) the recovery of scheme overpayments (ii) the collection of PRSI arrears and (iii) the enforcement of maintenance recovery orders against the liable relatives of one-parent family recipients.

266 criminal cases were finalised in 2006 with the following results:

Outcome	Number
Fined	105
Imprisoned	4
Suspended Sentence	16
Community Service	10
Probation Act	52
Bound to the Peace	2
Adjourned/Struck out/dismissed	70
Withdrawn	4
Debt Paid/ Decree obtained	3
TOTAL	266

→ OBJECTIVE 15

Ensure maintenance of timely, accurate and efficient systems of decision, appeal and redress for social welfare entitlements.

→ Decisions, Appeals and Redress

The Decisions Advisory Office (DAO) continued to play a pro-active role in the provision of advice and support to Deciding Officers in the Department, to ensure that decisions in regard to applications, or reviews on continued entitlement to Social Welfare payments, were carried out in a consistent and high quality manner.

With the aim of achieving consistency in decision-making and providing clarification on issues, the DAO continued to liaise with the Social Welfare Appeals Office (SWAO) during 2006. Regular meetings were held with that Office to discuss issues arising on the application of the legislation in decision-making.

During 2006, the DAO provided training to Deciding Officers in Social Welfare Local Offices in Dublin and Navan. In addition, two one-day training courses were presented to Deciding Officers in the Longford SWSO.

Over 400 requests were made to the DAO, by Deciding Officers and others, seeking advice on the interpretation of legislation and guidelines in relation to decisions on Social Welfare claims.

A review of the Guidelines and Procedures across the Department's schemes, which was initiated in 2005, was completed in 2006.

→ Freedom of Information (FOI)

In 2006, the FOI Unit continued the administration of FOI in the Department along with the provision of ongoing support and advice to staff.

During 2006, a total of 464 FOI requests were received in the Department. Of the requests received, 438 (95%) were from members of the public seeking access to personal records, including 16 requests from staff members for personnel records. There was one mixed request and the remainder were for non-personal records. A total of 453 requests were processed in 2006 of which 407 (90%) requests were granted in whole or in part.

→ OBJECTIVE 16

Ensure that the social welfare code meets the requirements of the Equal Status Act 2000, as amended, and other relevant legislation.

→ Review of the social welfare code

The Department is carrying out a technical review to examine the compatibility of the social welfare code with the Equal Status Act, 2000 (as amended) to identify any instances of difference of treatment that are not justified by a legitimate social policy objective.

In 2006, Phase 1 of the project was completed. This entailed a scoping exercise to identify an approach and methodology for carrying out the main review. The report from this process will form the basis of the terms of reference of the main review. Work has commenced on initiating Phase 2 with a request for tender being prepared. Following a tendering process, the main review will commence in 2007.

CHAPTER 08

GOAL 5: POVERTY, SOCIAL INCLUSION AND FAMILIES

GOAL 5: POVERTY, SOCIAL INCLUSION AND FAMILIES

To support and promote families and to attain better outcomes in tackling poverty and achieving a more inclusive society through co-operating, developing and implementing national anti-poverty strategies, and through the provision of income and other support services for people in debt or at risk of experiencing hardship

→ OBJECTIVE 1

Monitor, evaluate and report on the implementation of the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion (NAP) which incorporates the objectives and targets of the revised NAPS and the partnership agreement 'Sustaining Progress'.

→ National Anti Poverty Strategy (NAPS)

The Office for Social Inclusion (OSI), located in the Department, is the government office with overall responsibility for developing, driving and co-ordinating the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion (NAP/inclusion) 2003-2005 in addition to the social inclusion elements of other national strategies, and for the production of Ireland's next NAPinclusion, launched in early 2007.

Considerable progress was made during 2006 on the development of the new plan which covers the period 2007-2016 and complements the new National Development Plan (2007-2013) *TRANSFORMING IRELAND A Better Quality of Life for All*. These strategies will build on the lifecycle approach outlined in the new national partnership agreement, *Towards 2016*, by assessing the risks which individuals face at each stage of the lifecycle and the supports they need to meet these risks. The groups focussed on using this approach are Children, People of Working Age, Older People and People with Disabilities. This strategic framework is also being designed to create more coherent and integrated structures to achieve more effective implementation. It will also facilitate a better and a more effective reporting and monitoring process across the spectrum of government activity in the area of social inclusion.

→ National Report for Ireland on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2006 - 2008

Another key priority for the OSI during 2006 was the production of Ireland's National Report on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion, which was submitted to the European Commission in September 2006. The report outlines Ireland's key objectives and targets over the period 2006-2008 in relation to social inclusion, pensions and health and long term care. The social inclusion component of this report presents the key priorities in Ireland's efforts to promote greater social inclusion and make a decisive impact on poverty.

Copies of the report are available on the Office for Social Inclusion (OSI) website – www.socialinclusion.ie³ in the publications section, or directly from the Office for Social Inclusion, Department of Social and Family Affairs, Áras Mhic Dhiarmada, Store Street, Dublin 1
Tel: +353-1-7043851.

→ NAPS Social Inclusion Forum

The third meeting of the annual NAPS Social Inclusion Forum was held on 15 February 2006 in the Royal Hospital Kilmainham and was attended by approximately 300 participants from the voluntary and community sector, the statutory sector, local representatives, and members of the NESF. The Office for Social Inclusion and the National Economic and Social Forum co-funded and co-organised this event.

The annual Forum provides people who are affected by poverty and social exclusion and their representatives with an opportunity to

³ See Appendix 9 for list of the Department's and agencies' websites.

input their views on social inclusion issues and the 2006 meeting had a particular focus on the development of the 2007-2016 National Action Plan for Social Inclusion (NAPinclusion).

A key element of the day's events were the five parallel workshops, which were focused around the proposed priorities for action in the National Action Plan – Children and Families; People of Working Age; Public Services; Older People; and Public Participation. A formal report of the 2006 Social Inclusion Forum containing all inputs and reports of the workshop outputs was prepared and presented to the Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion and is available from the National Economic and Social Forum.

→ Institutional Structures

During 2006 OSI continued to support the institutional structures which underpin the NAPinclusion. In addition to the Office for Social Inclusion, these include:

- The Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion, chaired by the Taoiseach, which met six times during the year;
- The interdepartmental Senior Officials Group on Social Inclusion, co-ordinated by the Department of the Taoiseach which met monthly during 2006 to brief and advise the Cabinet Committee;
- The Social Inclusion Consultative Group, involving the social partners and anti-poverty experts, which met twice during 2006;
- Social Inclusion Officers/Units, established in key Government Departments, who work with the OSI on an ongoing basis on the co-ordination of their Department's contribution to the process ;
- The National Economic and Social Forum, which, in co-operation with the OSI, convened the Social Inclusion Forum (SIF) in February 2006;
- The Technical Advisory Group (TAG) chaired by OSI, which advises the Office on the formation of an enhanced data strategy to underpin the NAPS, progressed the agenda on poverty measurement during the year;

- National Development Plan (NDP)/Community Support Framework (CSF) Monitoring and Co-ordinating Committees. The promotion of Social Inclusion was one of 4 key objectives of the National Development Plan 2000-2006 and the OSI had responsibility for supporting the social inclusion horizontal principle within the NDP/CSF. To assist the progression of this process and generally increase the social inclusion focus of the NDP, the OSI participated on all NDP Monitoring Committees during 2006. Social Inclusion remains a key objective of the new NDP 2007-2013 with the inclusion of a chapter on social inclusion.

→ Development of a Comprehensive Strategic Framework for Social Inclusion

The OSI was involved in the further development of a comprehensive integrated strategic framework for social inclusion, and its constituent elements, during 2006. The framework encompasses the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion and the following:

- *Towards 2016* – social partnership agreement. The agreement provides a long-term framework for addressing key social inclusion challenges and adopts a new approach to tackling these problems based on the lifecycle approach. This seeks to orient public services around the needs of people at different stages of their lives – children, young adults, people of working age, older people and people with a disability.
- National Development Plan 2007-2013 – *TRANSFORMING IRELAND A Better Quality of Life for All*. The NDP provides the investment needed to realise the goals and a range of other actions and commitments included in *Towards 2016* and the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion.
- National Report for Ireland on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2006-2008. The social inclusion element of this report was compiled by the OSI under the EU's Open Method of Co-Ordination. The report was submitted to the EU Commission in September 2006

- North/South Co-operation on social inclusion. Creating a more inclusive society by alleviating social exclusion, poverty and deprivation is a continuing challenge for administrations North and South. The Irish and UK National Reports on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion, 2006-2008, contain common text outlining how the UK and Irish Governments are committed to developing and promoting co-operation in relation to combating poverty and social exclusion. The common text also appears in Northern Ireland's *Lifetime Opportunities: Government's Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy for Northern Ireland* and feature in Ireland's National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016.

→ OBJECTIVE 2

Ensure that there is a clear knowledge and understanding of the nature, extent and causes of poverty and social exclusion and the strategies to address it.

→ OSI Data Strategy

The Office for Social Inclusion (OSI) is responsible for developing a data strategy, designed to ensure that data is available in a timely manner for monitoring, evaluation, policy prioritising, targeting and overall social inclusion policy development. OSI is supported in this role by a Technical Advisory Group (TAG) comprising representatives of key Government Departments, the Central Statistics Office (CSO), the Combat Poverty Agency (CPA), the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) and the Equality Authority. Membership of this group will be expanded to include technical experts from the social partners in line with a commitment in the national partnership agreement, *Towards 2016*.

A review of how poverty is measured in Ireland, in order to better reflect current living standards was undertaken by the OSI during 2006, in the context of the preparation of the new NAPinclusion. Following an ESRI study on consistent poverty measurement, the measure was changed from one based on lacking one or

more items from an 8-item deprivation index to one based on lacking two or more items from an 11-item index. This revised measure has been reflected in the overall poverty goal of the new NAPinclusion, and progress in relation to this goal will be measured using the revised 11-item deprivation index. The complex issue of poverty measurement will be further considered by the OSI through the Technical Advisory Group during 2007.

Throughout 2006 OSI worked closely with government departments to seek to ensure that targets contained in the new NAPinclusion are designed to allow progress against them to be effectively monitored and measured. The importance of having relevant indicators and data sources to enable the development, monitoring and evaluation of the new Plan, and of the social inclusion elements of other national strategies, was addressed in discussions with relevant departments.

The issue of data and information gaps was also considered in a set of social portraits developed by the ESRI for the Office for Social Inclusion during 2006. The portraits provide a useful collection of data in respect of persons at different stages of the lifecycle and help to provide a clear picture of those groups who are most at risk of poverty and social exclusion. They also indicate those areas where further data is required to have a full social picture of persons at each stage of the lifecycle. The first of the portraits was published in early 2007.

→ Poverty Impact Assessment

Poverty impact assessment (PIA), formerly known as poverty proofing, was first introduced in 1998, and 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, or have had on poverty and on inequalities which are likely to lead to poverty, with a view to poverty reduction.

OSI undertook a review of the process during 2005 and produced new, significantly

strengthened guidelines with the introduction of a screening mechanism to determine which policies require a full impact assessment. Training will be provided for policy makers in the use of the new guidelines in 2007. The guidelines are currently available on the OSI website.

→ NAPS Communications Strategy

The National Action Plan for Social Inclusion recognises that there is a need for effective ongoing communication on the trends and challenges in relation to poverty and on the ongoing process for tackling it.

A key element of the work of the OSI during 2006 related to the development and implementation of a whole of government social inclusion communications strategy, commencing with the launch of the new NAPinclusion in February 2007.

The OSI website, which is a very important communications tool has been widely used during 2006. It has also been further developed during this period to reflect the growing emphasis at national, regional and local level on social inclusion. It contains links with a broad range of organisations and bodies in Ireland and internationally. The OSI website is now acknowledged to be a valuable resource in raising awareness about poverty and social exclusion in Ireland, and further development is underway.

→ OBJECTIVE 3

Develop the next National Action Plan 2006-2009.

The preparation of Ireland's next National Action Plan for Social Inclusion continued in 2006 with a series of detailed negotiations between OSI and senior officials and policy owners from relevant Government Departments.

The NAPinclusion which will run for a ten year period from 2007-2016 has been prepared in a different context to the original 1997 National Anti-Poverty Strategy. Income support targets (social welfare rates and pensions) have now been achieved and, in line with the NESC Report

on the Developmental Welfare State, there is greater emphasis on services and activation as a means of tackling social exclusion. This will be reflected in the nature of the Plan, and will closely complement the National Development Plan 2007-2013 and the social partnership agreement, *Towards 2016*.

→ Transnational Level

During 2006 the OSI was represented on the Social Protection Committee and the Social Protection Committee's Indicators' Sub Group (ISG) in relation to the formulation and definition of agreed common indicators for monitoring poverty and social exclusion. OSI was also actively involved in the European Union Community Action Programme to Combat Social Exclusion 2002-2006. The programme, which is part of the open method of co-ordination, aims at supporting co-operation between Member States on combating poverty and social exclusion.

→ British-Irish Council

The British Irish Council was established under the Belfast Agreement and works as a forum within which Member Administrations⁴ consult and exchange information with a view to co-operating on issues of mutual interest. One such issue is social inclusion; the Department of Social and Family Affairs co-ordinates Irish involvement in this strand of work. In this regard work on access to employment, education and training for people with disabilities was completed by the Council during 2006. A Report on Employment and Disability was discussed at a Ministerial meeting held in Edinburgh on 2 – 3 March 2006. It was decided that the next work topic would focus on child poverty, with a particular focus on lone parents. The detailed work programme for this new strand was considered at a meeting of officials in Dublin in April 2006.

⁴ Irish & British Governments, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Isle of Man, Guernsey, Jersey

→ Co-operation between Ireland and Northern Ireland on Social Inclusion issues

The Irish and UK National Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion, 2006-2008, contain common text outlining how the UK and Irish Governments are committed to developing and promoting co-operation in relation to combating poverty and social exclusion. The common text also appears in Northern Ireland's *Lifetime Opportunities: Government's Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy for Northern Ireland* and will feature in Ireland's National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016.

The common text commits both jurisdictions to preparing a Joint Report to include:

- an overview of areas of existing North/South co-operation
- areas potentially suitable for further co-operation and
- advice on the mechanisms by which this work might be undertaken and delivered.

The agreed Report will be submitted to the British Irish Inter-Governmental Conference (BIIGC).

→ OBJECTIVE 4

Develop a strategic process to facilitate the development of integrated policies to meet the needs of families in a changing society.

Strategic approach to supporting families

A report was commissioned in 2006 which looked at the key demographic, economic, social and other relevant changes taking place which are impacting on families and family life. On foot of this, it was agreed that a publication will be prepared that will aim to describe families in modern Ireland, to detail the range of supports available and to outline major policy developments over the past decade. It will also include a summary of supports specifically directed at families and will outline the likely future trends in relation to family change and the challenges these pose for current policies and programmes.

→ OBJECTIVE 5

Ensure that the Family Support Agency (FSA) receives the necessary support and resources to enable it carry out its functions and implement its strategy in relation to supports for families.

The Family Support Agency was allocated a budget of over €28m in 2006, an increase of some 15% on the budget in 2005. This level of funding allowed the Agency to deliver on its Strategic Plan commitments in 2006 which included the provision of support services and related information for families, the continued development of the Family Resource Centre Programme, further expansion of the national Family Mediation Service. Specific achievements during 2006 included:-

- The further expansion of the national Family Mediation Service to 16 centres.
- An increase in funding for the family counselling grants scheme to over €9 million leading to the direct support of more than 540 voluntary and community groups nationwide.
- The publication of a very positive independent review of the Counselling Grants scheme, which found the scheme 'highly effective.'
- Total funding for the Family Resource Centre (FRC) programme in 2006 amounted to over €12.9 million. The NDP target of having 100 Centres included in the FRC programme by the end of 2006 was achieved.

→ OBJECTIVE 6

Complete the development of policies to provide a more effective and integrated range of income and other supports for families at risk of poverty, particularly lone parents and large families, designed to enable them achieve greater self sufficiency and social inclusion.

→ Family Services Project

The Family Services Project fund is used to provide or co-fund training and development programmes for disadvantaged Social Welfare customers and their families including very young lone mothers,

other parents rearing children without the support of a partner, Carers, Travellers and the disabled.

It is hoped that these programmes will increase the capacity of those in the most difficult circumstances to improve their self-esteem and personal and family situations through the training, developmental and educational opportunities made available which include parenting skills courses, family support programmes and personal development programmes. From January to December 2006, over 400 projects or individuals were assisted at a total cost of €2.2 million.

See examples of programme initiatives in the Appendix to this chapter.

→ OBJECTIVE 7

Ensure that no person experiences hardship for want of basic necessities, because they have exceptional needs or because they have difficulties accessing relevant services.

Supplementary Welfare Allowance (SWA) is administered by the HSE through the Community Welfare Officers at local health centres on behalf of the Department. It consists of a means tested basic weekly allowance payable to those whose means are insufficient to meet their needs and those of their dependants. Additional payments including Rent/Mortgage Interest Supplement, Exceptional Needs Payments and urgent needs payments are also payable.

→ Core Functions Programme

As part of its reform of the health service, the Government decided to transfer certain functions from the health sector to this Department and to consider transferring certain other functions from the Department of Social & Family Affairs (DSFA) to the health sector. The Core Functions Programme has been set up to implement that Government decision. The Government has decided that:

1. Income support and maintenance schemes, together with associated resources, should be transferred to DSFA (i.e., Supplementary Welfare Allowance and related schemes and cost of disability and caring payments currently administered by the Health Service Executive (HSE));
2. The General Register Office (GRO) should transfer to DSFA
3. An examination into the mechanics of transferring the dental and other treatment benefits from DSFA to the health sector should be commenced, and
4. An inter-departmental group should be set up to proceed with the implementation

A steering group chaired by the Department has been established to oversee implementation of the Government decision. The four separate working groups respectively dealing with the various elements of the transfer programme have agreed their terms of reference with a view to setting out an agreed programme to oversee the successful delivery of each element of the programme. All groups have now met on a number of occasions and appropriate project management structures have been put in place. An implementation programme will be developed by mid 2007.

→ OBJECTIVE 8

Support, through a nationwide Money Advice and Budgeting Service, families and individuals identified as having problems with debt and moneylending.

Money Advice and Budgeting Service

The Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) provides assistance to people who are over indebted and need help and advice in coping with debt problems. There are 52 independent companies nation-wide delivering advice and a national company MABS NDL was established to support and develop the Service. The key features of the programme are summarised as follows:

- An emphasis on practical, budget based measures.
- An approach that targets families identified as having problems with debt and money-lending.
- A prominent role for local statutory agencies.
- The scheme includes a general money advice element for the local community.
- A co-ordinated scheme allowing for the sharing of experiences and information to combat money-lending.

A management committee drawn from local voluntary and statutory services and community groups runs each local project. Local MABS operate as partnerships of all relevant agencies. The service is funded by the Department and in 2006, €16.4 million was provided to fund the service representing an increase of 20% on the previous year.

→ Proposals to establish the Money Advice and Budgeting Service on a statutory basis

New proposals for legislation are being developed to establish MABS on a statutory basis. The proposals would involve a continuation of local voluntary involvement with strong national leadership to ensure a high quality and coordinated budgeting and advice service for the future, in particular for people on low incomes.

→ Co-operation with partner organisations

Many voluntary and statutory bodies such as the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, the Community Welfare Service, Citizens' Information Centres, Centres for the Unemployed and local authorities work closely with the programme. The credit union movement has been a key partner in MABS since its inception and their involvement and support is central to the development and success of the service.

During 2006, co-operation with these and other organisations such as the Free Legal Advice

Centres, the Residential Redress Board, The Irish Bankers Federation and the Financial Regulator continued to identify and address the issues that give rise to problems of over-indebtedness for people on low incomes and to understand the barriers they face in accessing mainstream financial services and cheap forms of credit which adds to the difficulties people encounter in managing their finances.

→ Number of Clients

In 2006 a total of 12,365 new clients have approached MABS. The majority of these clients were aged between 26-40 years and they were single or single with children. Just over 50% of people were in receipt of a social welfare payment and a further 30% were in work. 70% of clients had no second income coming into the household. The active caseload at the end of the year comprised 14,609 with a further 11,660 clients discharged over the course of the year.

The total amount owed by the new clients to creditors, based on what their debt was when they first approached the service, so far this year amounts to €79 million.

→ Appendix to Chapter 8

The following is a sample of the 2006 Family Services Project initiatives:

* Ballina Neighbourhood Youth Project, Co. Mayo

Ballina Neighbourhood Youth Project is a Partnership between Foroige and the HSE and is a community based adolescent and family support service with particular emphasis on working with young people who are experiencing or at risk of personal or social disadvantage.

The group delivered a series of personal development courses for young parents under the age of 23. These courses aimed to enable young people to involve themselves consciously and actively in their own development and in the development of their community.

Courses included subjects such as ECDL and Driving Theory, cooking skills and learning how to deal with younger children. The course also provided them with a break from home and a social outlet.

The project makes a positive change in participant's lives by assisting them clarify and realise goals, improve personal relationships, overcome stress and build self-confidence and self-image.

* Family Support Project, Brothers of Charity Services, Roscommon

This programme which commenced in September 2006 is designed to support families which have one or more children with an intellectual disability/autism. It aims to offer a comprehensive range of training to families who are raising children with ID/Autism and to enhance their skills.

The programme has three separate strands which seek to address the needs of parents, the young people themselves and siblings.

It aims to enhance the skills of parents by maximising children's learning, language and

social development; building co-operation and good social behaviour; building self-esteem; problem solving and conflict management; and building good relationships and communicating positively.

It also aims to enhance the understanding and personal skills of young people with ID/Autism establishing healthy relationships and building self-esteem and self confidence.

Finally it provides siblings of people with ID/Autism with an opportunity to explore feelings and concerns around disability; to share experiences of having a family member with ID/Autism and to explore the role of advocacy in relation to siblings with disabilities. In addition it provides age appropriate information on types of disabilities, causes and effects.

* Traveller Interagency Primary Healthcare Programmes

The overall aim of the Traveller Primary Healthcare programmes is to establish Traveller women participation in the promotion of health by increasing participant's knowledge of health care and community development and to train Traveller women as Community Health Workers to work in their own community alongside Health professionals to ultimately improve the health status of Travellers.

These programmes are funded on a multi agency basis by the HSE, FÁS and the Department. In 2006 programmes were funded in the South East Region in Carlow/Kilkenny, Bunclody, Co. Wexford; Cashel, Co. Tipperary and Dungarvan, Co. Waterford.

The programmes provided participant's with the opportunity to attain FETAC Level 3 modules in Family Health, Literacy, Personal and Interpersonal Skills, Health Related Fitness, Computer Literacy, Communications, Maths and Community Development. All training was provided in a Traveller-led, culturally appropriate manner.

CHAPTER 09

GOAL 6: THE DEPARTMENT AND ITS STAFF

- HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
- INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY
- GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT OF RESOURCES
- SAFE AND HEALTHY WORKING ENVIRONMENT
- POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING

GOAL 6: THE DEPARTMENT AND ITS STAFF

To develop an effective, adaptable and capable organisation and a culture of pride, innovation and performance with a high level of involvement by people at all levels and a climate which fosters personal and career development

Continuing to provide a quality service in an expanding business presents a considerable challenge for the Department. The support for, and involvement of, staff throughout the organisation, both those working in the front line of service delivery and those providing essential support services, is a key priority for the Department. The following are the main developments in those areas in 2006:

Human Resource Management and Organisational Development

→ OBJECTIVE 1

Implement our Human Resource Strategy 2003-2005.

The purpose of the Department's HR Strategy is to bring together our various HR policies, integrate them within the overall organisational strategy and, therefore, place Human Resources at the centre of the Department's decision-making. The implementation of the Strategy was monitored via the Management Board and the Department's Partnership process.

Work commenced in 2006 on a new strategy to cover the period up to 2009.

→ Devolution of responsibility to line managers

As part of the preparations for devolution of greater responsibility and authority in the HR area to line managers, sources of information and advice for managers continue to be developed, including a Human Resources intranet which came into operation during the year. The intranet site contains a comprehensive range of easy-to-access material, including circulars, guidelines

and policy documents. Topics covered include leave arrangements, attendance management, decentralisation, induction, supports for staff with disabilities, flexible working arrangements, PMDS, promotion competitions, the 'positive working environment', equality and the Employee Assistance Service.

→ Attendance Management Policy

The communication and monitoring of the implementation of the Department's Attendance Management Policy continued during the year.

→ Exploiting technology options

In 2005 CMOD, Department of Finance engaged consultants to establish a managed services environment to provide for the future support and development of the HRM technology system. The Department participated in a cross-Departmental team to develop the template for a further upgrade of the system, while also assessing whether a move to managed services was appropriate for the Department. In late 2005, the Department decided to participate in managed services. The project, to move to managed services and to upgrade the HRM system, commenced in June 2006 and the upgraded system went live in managed services in September 2006. Post-implementation work continued during 2006 with the managed services arrangement being monitored closely to ensure that it meets the Department's support needs.

→ Time & Attendance System

The initial phase of the new Time & Attendance System for the Department commenced in late 2006. The project will progress in 2007 with the implementation of the system in pilot sites



John Hynes, Secretary-General and Bernadette Lacey, Director General with Mairéad Nic Con Iomaire and Angela Torsney who received the INPUT Idea of the Year award 2006.
(not present: Mary Holmes)

commencing in March/April 2007. An evaluation of the pilots will be followed by a phased roll-out of the system to other offices of the Department, commencing later in 2007.

→ Staff merit awards

There are two such award systems in the Department at present:

a) Fiúntas - Employee Recognition Scheme

The Fiúntas Scheme is an exceptional performance award scheme whose purpose is to increase staff motivation, to recognise exceptional performance and to encourage fresh input and foster a climate of change. In 2006 a total of 126 awards were made to 53 individuals and 73 teams across a wide number of areas of the Department.

b) Input Award Scheme

In 2006, a total of 337 suggestions were received under the INPUT scheme. This represents an increase of 20% over the total number of suggestions received in 2005. Of these, 307 were deemed to be valid and 30 were still under consideration at the end of the year. 22 of the valid suggestions received awards during 2006

while a further 53 suggestions, dating from previous years, also received awards.

The annual INPUT Awards ceremony was held on 7 December. The "Idea of Year" for 2006, which attracts a bonus award of €750, went to three staff of the Pensions Services Office in Sligo who proposed a number of improvements to the application process for the Blind Person's Pension Scheme. Award certificates were presented to the winners by the Secretary General.

→ OBJECTIVE 2

Provide a positive working environment and, in line with equality legislation, promote equality of opportunity for all employees of the Department.

→ The Employee Assistance Service (EAS)

The coordination of the Department's Employee Assistance Service with other Health and Welfare areas, arising from a reorganisation of Personnel functions and areas of responsibility during 2006, will facilitate a more focused approach to

employee welfare generally. The usage of the Employee Assistance Service during 2006 at over 12% remains high and consistent with average usage over the preceding years. A positive feature of the Service is that over 80% of staff who make contact do so by self-referral. In this regard it is hoped to develop the Service further by the availing of technology developments such as an intranet website providing a wide range of health and welfare information to staff in a speedy and easily accessible way.

→ Anti-harassment, sexual harassment and bullying policy

'A Positive Working Environment' is the Civil Service policy for dealing with harassment, sexual harassment and bullying in the workplace. It applies to all staff working in departments and offices, including staff on contract.

The original policy was introduced in July 2000. A revised version of the Policy was published in September 2005. The Policy was revised to reflect subsequent developments at national and EU level as well as taking on board the experience gained in the civil service in the operation of the policy. A copy of the revised policy was issued to all staff in September 2005. The revised policy places a greater emphasis on formal mediation as the preferred means of resolving allegations of this nature rather than the full investigation process. A number of mediators are being trained to assist in this. Information in regard to dealing with allegations of bullying and harassment is also given on departmental management training courses. Seminars to raise awareness and knowledge of the whole area of bullying and harassment have been held for staff.

During 2006, a number of awareness raising information sessions on the subject of the Positive Working Environment Policy and the experience of the Department to date of the policy were delivered. Approximately 600 staff drawn from across the Department were involved. The response from the staff regarding these sessions has been very positive. Further initiatives in this area are in preparation.

→ Health Promotion Programme

During the year the Department developed and introduced a number of health promotion initiatives. Following research, a voluntary and subsidised health screening programme was developed and implemented. Approximately 1,500 staff participated in the programme. Allied to this the Department continued to provide information to staff about health and lifestyle issues. Advice on the specific area of stress management was provided through a number of channels; training programmes, information talks and related material.

→ Promotion of work-life balance for employees

The continued support of work/life balance initiatives in the Department, has proven to be a very positive factor in the overall retention policy. The Department has a record of promoting and implementing a range of work-life balance arrangements which allow people to balance work and other responsibilities in a way which suits their circumstances. At the end of 2006 23% of staff were worksharing and 420 staff availed of the term time scheme. The Department's aim is to operate these arrangements in a fair and reasonable way and to the greatest extent possible, taking into account the imperative to always provide a high standard of service to the public.

→ Equality and diversity policies

In line with the Civil Service Gender and Diversity Policies and its own published commitments the Department is developing a range of initiatives aimed at increasing staff awareness of equality issues as they apply across the broad HR agenda. The implementation of the Department's Gender Equality Action Plan (based on the Civil Service Gender Equality Policy) continued during the year. A review of the implementation of the Plan will be produced early in 2007.

→ Supports for staff with disabilities.

The Department's Sectoral Plan under the Disability Act was published in July. It includes a range of commitments aimed at meeting the needs of its staff with disabilities, in line with the provisions of Part 5 of the Act. A Disability Monitoring Committee involving representatives from the Department and the agencies under its aegis has been established as set out in the Sectoral Plan. The role of the Committee is to oversee and report on the extent of compliance with Part 5 of the Disability Act by the public bodies under the aegis of the Department, to encourage such compliance and to discuss progress of the human resource-related commitments in the Sectoral Plan.

The Needs Assessment process is a central element of the Department's supports for staff with disabilities. It includes on-site visits by the Disability Liaison Officer, Health & Safety Officer and a representative from Information Systems Division in which physical access, IT and HR requirements are discussed with the staff member and their line manager.

A revised version of the Department's Disability Awareness Guidelines was issued to all members of staff during the year. These guidelines were developed in consultation with members of staff with disabilities and particularly emphasise communication with people with disabilities.

During the year the Department won a number of awards under the O2 Ability Awards programme for best practice in the employment of people with disabilities.

→ OBJECTIVE 3

Foster good industrial and employee relations throughout the Department

A stable industrial relations climate was maintained through the operation of the formal industrial relations machinery and through continuous communication and consultation with staff unions and associations.

→ OBJECTIVE 4

Ensure that each staff member has the knowledge, skills and competencies to contribute effectively to achieving the business goals of the Department and develop the role of the manager as the key facilitator in implementing change and improvement.

→ Integration of Performance Management and Development System (PMDS)

General Council Report 1452, which was published in 2005, set out how PMDS would be integrated with the increments, promotions and higher scales HR processes and how it would also have linkages with the probations process. Under the Agreement, 2006 was to be a 'familiarisation year' and from January 2007, the PMDS integrated model would be used for actual decisions in relation to increments, promotions and assignments to higher scales. During 2006 the Department implemented a range of preparatory measures and communication/consultation processes to ensure that the new arrangements (including a new 5-point ratings scale) were operated effectively. The forms used in the PMDS process were substantially revised to reflect the integration agenda. The implementation of PMDS is monitored by the Management Committee and a PMDS Board which includes Partnership representatives.

→ PMDS Personal Development and Training Plans

PMDS Personal Development and Training Plans are the primary mechanism of submitting training requests to Staff Development Unit (SDU). During 2006, SDU received 3,119 PMDS Personal Development and Training Plans.

→ Training & Development Services Supplied

Staff Development Unit (SDU) provides a range of training and development services for staff of the Department. During 2006, it delivered almost 300 training courses to 2,555 staff. In addition to

formal training courses, SDU continued to actively promote on-the-job training and coaching, and to make available self-managed learning options through the Learning Centre, the latter dealt with 620 requests during the year.

→ SDU Website

SDU's website went live in 2006. It provides details of training and development services available and an e-learning facility. To date, the site has had 6,358 'hits'.

→ Customer Engagement Programme

SDU embarked on a customer engagement programme during 2006 where it met with the management teams of business units of the Department to discuss training needs and priorities. A number of successful interventions have been implemented as a result of this engagement.

→ Refund of Fees

During 2005/2006, 149 staff availed of the Refund of Fees scheme.

→ Initiatives

An initiative to promote the Irish language in the Department – Comhdháil na Gaeilge – was held in 2006 and it focused on the requirements of the Official Languages Act, 2003.

A Partnership Training Programme for newly formed and existing committees was provided.

An Assistant Principal (AP) Induction Programme was delivered to newly appointed APs and those who transferred to the Department under the decentralisation programme.

Other initiatives launched in SDU during 2006 included revision of induction course, introduction of a "Dealing with non-English Speaking Customers" course for front-line staff dealing with

an increasing multi-cultural customer base and development of facilitation and action learning.

→ Supports to Decentralising Sections

During 2006, SDU delivered an average of 3 courses to 39 staff who transferred into or within the Department to decentralise under Phase 1 of the programme.

→ Decentralisation of SDU

Phase 1 of SDU's Decentralisation to Sligo took place during 2006 and a range of training programmes were delivered from the new location.

→ Excellence Through People (ETP)

During 2006, Staff Development Unit was assessed and accredited at the Gold Level ETP, i.e., the FÁS National Standard for Human Resource Management.

→ Other training initiatives

Training and updating of regional staff included the following initiatives:

- Delivery of a two day PRSI Training Programme for inspectors and managers
- Mental Health Awareness Training (in association with Mental Health Ireland)
- Quality Assurance for Investigative Activity including the circulation of a quality assurance users handbook.

→ OBJECTIVE 5

Ensure a working environment which is based on co-operation, participation and mutual support.

→ Partnership

A key guiding principle of the Department is the recognition that effective delivery of our services and management of our work requires a partnership approach between management, unions and staff.

The Department's Partnership Steering Committee is tasked with promoting and fostering the development of Partnership in the Department. In addition, under the National Agreements - *Sustaining Progress* - and *Towards 2016* the Partnership Steering Committee must agree the Department's Modernisation Action Plan and consider the various reports on progress on implementing the Plan.

The Partnership Steering Committee met on nine occasions in 2006, including a one-day seminar.

→ Climate Survey Action Plan

In consultation with the Management Advisory Committee (MAC), the Senior Management Team (SMT), and a number of partnership committees⁵ a range of actions were drawn up to address the challenges identified which was published in September 2004. These actions were set out in an agreed Action Plan which was circulated for implementation in August 2006.

The Action Plan covered the following broad areas: Better communications, PMDS, consistency in performance standards and mobility.

⁵ Each Partnership committee (regional, local and specialist) was invited to identify actions for inclusion in the Action Plan. Fourteen committees responded.

Information and Communications Technology

→ OBJECTIVE 1

Operate, maintain and enhance the Department's information technology production systems

The Department continues to have in place system maintenance and business continuity activities to ensure that payments are issued correctly and on time, and that new systems are in place to support new policies and procedures.

The initiatives supported by IT in 2006 include:

- All increases in payment rates announced in the 2006 Budget were implemented in time
- Changes in the tapered Increases for Qualified Adults were made in time for the effective date of May 2006
- Pensions systems were adapted to cater for new Bank Identification Codes for certain countries in the Euro zone
- Christmas bonus payments made on time, including for the first time the payment of a Christmas Bonus to people on Carer's Benefit.
- One Parent Family Payment cases moved between computer systems, to facilitate their roll-out to local offices
- IT support provided for opening of new Family Support Agency offices.

→ OBJECTIVE 2

Develop and enhance ICT systems to respond to the requirements of the Department's change agenda.

See Goal 4, objectives 9-12 incl.

Governance and Management of Resources

→ OBJECTIVE 1

Ensure the governance arrangements of the Department and its agencies are appropriate to achieve the task which must be undertaken.

The Department's agencies are:

- The Pensions Board
- The Family Support Agency
- Combat Poverty Agency
- Comhairle/Citizens Information Board
- Pensions Ombudsman

See Chapter 1 for details of the functions of these agencies.

The Department liaises regularly with all its agencies and participates in the work of various committees as appropriate. It is represented on the Pensions Board and on the boards of the other agencies.

The Pensions Board and the Pensions Ombudsman submit an annual report to the Minister; the accounts of all the agencies are audited by the Comptroller and Auditor General each year.

→ Management Board and sub-committees

The Management Board (formerly known as the Management Advisory Committee) was restructured in 2006 as a result of a consultants' review of its role and functions.

The Board is supported by a number of sub-committees including the Risk and Operations Committee and the Policy Committee. In addition, the Top Management Team of Social Welfare Services meets on a regular basis.

→ DSFA Audit Committee

The DSFA Audit Committee, which operates under a written charter and whose membership of six includes three external members (including the Chairperson), is an integral part of the Department's corporate governance processes. The Committee met on four occasions in 2006 and provided advice and guidance to the Department in relation to business control, internal audit, risk management, its relationship with external audit and other governance issues.

→ OBJECTIVE 2

Ensure the Strategic Management Initiative (SMI) is implemented in the Department.

Under the Sustaining Progress agreement, the Department's Modernisation Action Plan (MAP) continued until mid-2006. Good progress was made on implementing the MAP during the year. Key priorities included:

- **New technology and eGovernment:** Considerable progress was made on the SDM programme, including new releases for State Pension (Transition), State Pension (Contributory), Early Childcare Supplement and other Budget changes. (For more details, see Goal 4, objective 12,)
- **Continuing the programme of process improvement and localisation of services:** Localisation of the new One Parent Family Payment claims to local offices was completed and the localisation of existing claims was started.
- **Maintaining business continuity in the context of, in particular, preparations for decentralisation:** Progress was in line with the Department's decentralisation implementation plan, and focussed in particular on the forthcoming moves to Sligo and Carrick-on-Shannon which are scheduled for early 2007. (See Objective 6 of this Goal for more details)

- **Effective implementation of PMDS and, in particular, addressing issues raised in the staff attitude survey:** During 2006 the Department implemented a range of preparatory measures and communications process to ensure that the new arrangements for PMDS were working satisfactorily. (See PMDS section of Objective 4 of this goal) An action plan to address the issues raised in the staff attitude survey was circulated to all staff in August 2006.
- **Continued progress on the MIF project and related initiatives.** (See Objective 3 of the “Government and Management of Resources” section of this Goal).

Following the publication of *Towards 2016: Ten-Year Framework Social Partnership Agreement*, a new Modernisation Action Plan was prepared. After consultation with the Department’s Partnership Steering Committee, the MAP was agreed in late 2006. It builds on the progress of the last MAP by continued development of key projects, and also includes new modernisation initiatives such as: implementation of the transfer of certain functions from the Health Sector to DSFA; implementation of the Department’s Disability Sectoral Plan; new document, record and information management systems across the Department; and new social and economic participation measures as set out in *Towards 2016*.

→ OBJECTIVE 3

Ensure that the Department maintains a robust system of internal control and arrangements to evaluate same and that the principles of efficiency, effectiveness and economy are applied in all the Department’s activities.

→ Internal Audit of control processes

The robustness of internal control processes was subjected to continuous review during the year. All significant control and governance issues and recommendations brought to attention by internal and external audit and by other review areas were responded to by management and enhancements actioned as appropriate.

During 2006, the DSFA Internal Audit Unit - which is an independent, objective, assurance and consulting activity, provided audit reports, reviews, questionnaires and other audit activities in respect of many aspects of the Department’s business environment including social welfare schemes, head office areas, computer areas and local offices.

→ Payment and Agency Reconciliation Project (PARP)

The objective of PARP is to provide an integrated reconciliation solution which will reconcile all the Department’s payment instruments and associated agency accounts and will integrate with the Department’s financial and payment systems. The project is currently under way and good progress was made in 2006.

→ Project Governance

The Department’s Project Governance Committee (PGC) meets monthly to prioritise, approve and monitor projects and review, where necessary resource requirements including allocations for consultancy. A Project Management Framework, based on best practice, is in place and is subject to continuous improvement on an ongoing basis. Supports available to Project Managers have included information seminars, training, guidelines and templates.

→ Management Reporting

During 2006 the focus of the Department’s Management Information Framework (MIF) Project was on the development of a management information system and the design of associated management reports for regional business activities. These reports contain both financial and non-financial data. A MIF data warehouse has been built to facilitate the production of these reports.

This body of work entailed an in-depth re-examination of the Department’s business activities, existing reports and various data sources so as to arrive at a common understanding of business terminology and data definitions in order to produce meaningful management reports.

The reports and production systems have been refined and adapted over the past year and the underlying data has been validated. A business intelligence tool – Business Objects – has been acquired to deliver the reports and enable interrogation of the underlying data. Management reports in respect of Social Welfare Local Offices will be rolled-out in Spring 2007.

→ Costing and “Annual Output Statement”

During 2006 work was done on the design of an automated system to facilitate the production of the “Annual Output Statement” which will be required for 2007. This system will also provide an environment for the development of costing reports. A draft of the “Annual Output Statement” was produced and the process of validating the data and data structure is ongoing.

→ Procurement Services

A draft Procurement Strategy was prepared in 2006 and will be finalised in 2007. The strategy includes an annual procurement plan which will ensure that the Department continues to maximise the potential to deliver value for money in the area of procurement.

→ Performance under Prompt Payment Legislation

The Department complied with the provisions of Prompt Payment Legislation in 2006. In the relatively small number of cases where the statutory limit for payment was exceeded, the relevant amount of interest was included in the total payment. In 2006, there were 90 late payments, the value of which amounted to 0.2% of total payments. Prompt payment interest amounted to approximately €3,200.

→ OBJECTIVE 4

Promote and develop a risk awareness and management culture which will complement and underpin the Department’s corporate governance process.

A dedicated Risk Management Division has responsibility for promoting and supporting the development of a risk management system in the Department. It provides the necessary technical and administrative support and guidance to enable the business to understand, identify and manage risk.

Following the successful implementation of a comprehensive Risk Management Programme in 2005, work continued through 2006 to more deeply embed the process to ensure that the management of risk is fully integrated into business processes. All Divisions across the Department are now actively engaged in identifying and managing risks. High Level Risks are monitored on a quarterly basis by a high-level Risk and Operations Committee.

The Department is highly dependent on secure and resilient ICT systems to support critical business process. During 2006, an Information Risk Management project was undertaken to identify and address risks arising in relation to the confidentiality, availability or integrity of the important information resources.

→ OBJECTIVE 5

Design, develop and implement document and data management strategies for the Department.

Document and records handling unit

The document, record and information management (DRIM) programme is a key element of the Department’s ongoing change and modernisation programme.

The vision is to have all documents, records and information easily accessible, usable and managed in a manner that satisfies all stakeholders. The intention is to eliminate, in so far as is possible, paper from the administrative

process and to store, retrieve and process all files, records, etc. in electronic format.

A strategy, which sets out a five year roadmap to achieve the vision, was developed and a business case to underpin the strategy was drawn up. The implementation of the strategy will greatly enhance the capability of staff in the Department to manage information strategically and to process documents, records and information quickly and successfully. The implementation of the strategy, commencing in 2007, is critical to enabling radical improvement of the Department's overall efficiency and effectiveness.

→ OBJECTIVE 6

Deliver, in accordance with the timeframe approved by Government, on decentralisation programme.

Work continued during 2006 on preparations for the relocation, under Phase 1 of the decentralisation plan, of nine sections to Sligo and Carrick-on-Shannon. These are as follows:

Sligo

- Internal Audit
- Staff Development
- Information/Quality Customer Service/Payment Strategy/Document, Record and Information Management

Carrick-on-Shannon

- Client Identity Services
- Social and Family Support Services (Back to Work Allowance and PRSI Exemptions)
- Control Division and Central Prosecutions
- Maintenance Recovery
- Decisions Advisory Office/Freedom of Information
- Overpayment/Debt Management

The Department continues to liaise with other departments involved in the decentralisation programme and provides the information and support necessary.

→ Supporting the process

A Decentralisation Information Day, held on 21 March 2006, was attended by representatives from each of the decentralisation project teams. The Decentralisation Project Board held seven meetings over the course of the year and progress updates were provided by each of the support sections. A Partnership sub-group provides a channel to highlight staff related issues. As part of the communication strategy for the programme, a fourth issue of the Decentralisation Newsletter was produced in April 2006 which provided staff with an update on the plan.

→ Staff movement plans

During 2006, almost all staff assignments to those business units identified to decentralise to Sligo were made, in preparation for the move scheduled for early 2007. In addition, staff assignments commenced to the sections identified for relocation to Carrick-on-Shannon. Formal offers of transfer have issued to applicants in relation to all of the Department's six locations under the Decentralisation Programme.

Safe and Healthy Working Environment

→ OBJECTIVE 1

Ensure quality accommodation is provided and is maintained to the highest standard to enable customers/staff to have a clean, comfortable and safe environment.

→ Health and Safety

Work progressed on implementing the recommendations from the consultancy review of health and safety matters carried out in 2005.

→ Accommodation

In association with OPW, work continued on progressing the Department's accommodation

improvement programme. This included the provision of new office accommodation in Cobh and Youghal and a major refurbishment of existing accommodation in Galway.

Policy Development and Planning

→ OBJECTIVE 1

Promote and support an effective, inclusive and consultative policy making process

Consultation with stakeholders is a key element of the policy making process within the Department. It is an essential element in addressing policy issues and in determining an effective response to the needs of customers in the context of a changing economic and social environment. Such consultation and the development of participative structures where customer representative organisations and stakeholders generally can express views, provide feedback on services delivered and input into policy making is necessary in order to ensure that income support programmes and associated supports continue to be relevant and effective.

The Department facilitates this participative structure through various fora including the annual pre- and post- Budget fora, through submissions to working groups and through engagement with various customer representative groups.

The introduction of Regulatory Impact Analysis (RIA) also requires the Department to consult with relevant stakeholders in advance of introducing primary legislation and significant statutory instruments. RIA ensures that the potential impacts, including costs and benefits, of new regulation or regulatory change are assessed at policy design stage.

The Department's Policy Committee met eight times during 2006.

In light of experience gained from dealing with issues and in its liaison role with the SWAO and the Ombudsman's Office, the Decisions Advisory Office provided input to the policy and legislative process in 2006.

The following are examples of consultation initiatives during the year:

- a) The Department hosted a public consultation forum in April 2006 following the launch of the Government discussion paper entitled *Proposals for supporting Lone Parents* (see Goal 3, objective 3). The forum was attended by groups working with lone parents, representatives from Government Departments, State Agencies, the social partners and members from the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Social and Family Affairs. The discussion paper was also debated in the Seanad and at the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Social and Family Affairs. In addition, the Department has dealt with submissions from and has met the key groups representing lone parents to discuss their concerns.
- b) The 2006 Pre-Budget Forum took place in October. The purpose of this Forum is to give voluntary organisations operating in the social services area an opportunity to express their views, concerns and priorities with regard to social welfare improvements in the run-up to the Budget. Thirty-two organisations were invited to attend the Forum. Representatives from the Combat Poverty Agency, the Family Support Agency, the National Disability Authority, the Department of Finance and Comhairle also attended. A representative from each organisation was also invited to attend the Post-Budget Forum which was held on the evening of Budget Day in December 2006.
- c) Consultative Forum- Supporting People with Disabilities: The Forum consists of the principal organisations representing people with disabilities and service providers and meets on a quarterly basis. Due to the extensive consultation process associated with the preparation for and publication of the

Departments Disability Sectoral Plan a total of seven meetings were held in 2006. The primary objective of the Forum is to act as a channel to communicate the views of such organisations to the Department and engage in positive dialogue with these organisations. It provides a mechanism to review and make recommendations, which can influence policy formulation. In addition, the Forum reviews the operation and administration of income and employment support services delivered by the Department.

→ OBJECTIVE 2

Support the development and implementation of responses to cross-departmental issues.

The development of policy requires close co-operation with other Departments where a particular policy initiative is shared across Departments. This co-operation is critical to the achievement of many of the Department's objectives and is manifest in many areas of the Department's activities including the development of proposals arising from the Government discussion paper "Proposals for Supporting Lone Parents" (see Goal 2, Objective 3). Similarly, the work undertaken by the Long-Term Care Working Group (see Goal 2, objective 6) involved DSFA officials working closely with other departments. The various employment supports (see Goal 2, objective 2) are designed and operated in co-operation with, inter alia, FÁS and the Department of Education.

In other areas, departmental personnel cooperated with staff of other Departments as evidenced in the Working Group which was established to prepare an Options Paper for the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform on Domestic Partnership and in the preparation of a National Women's Strategy.

→ OBJECTIVE 3

Monitor and evaluate the performance of schemes in meeting their desired objectives.

The expenditure/value for money review process 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 21 expenditure reviews. The *Review of the Supplementary Welfare Allowance scheme (phase II)* and the *Review of the Application of the Unemployment Benefit and Assistance Schemes Conditions to Workers who are not Employed on a Full-time Basis* were completed in 2006.

→ Supplementary Welfare Allowance (Phase II)

The second phase of the Review commenced in February 2005 and consisted of an in-depth examination of the efficiency and effectiveness of the component parts of the scheme, the validity of the objectives of the scheme, made a series of recommendations in relation to the future delivery of the scheme and specified suitable performance indicators which can be used to monitor and evaluate the scheme in the future.

The review is available on the Department's website.

→ Unemployment (Jobseeker's) Benefit and Assistance Schemes Conditions for Atypical Workers

The review of the UA/UB schemes conditions as they are applied to atypical workers was carried out by a working group led by the Department. It comprised representatives of the Departments of Social and Family Affairs, Enterprise, Trade and Employment, and Finance.

In order to identify and examine the objectives of the Unemployment Benefit (UB) scheme conditions in relation to part-time and other atypical workers, the working group sought

submissions from representative groups and engaged a research company to carry out a survey of both employers and employees. In addition, the working group carried out an examination of the UB schemes available in other countries.

The review considered a number of policy and organisational options for reform and proposed a package of measures to deal with the core issues. The review will be published in 2007.

→ OBJECTIVE 4

Develop DSFA data holdings as a resource supporting policy development and programme evaluation and ensure that our data sources facilitate national developments in social and equality statistics.

A questionnaire to survey the data needs of both policy and operational schemes owners, with particular focus on data collected in administrative systems, was prepared in 2005. This survey was carried out in 2006 and will be analysed in 2007, in consultation with the CSO.



APPENDICES

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Status Report On Organisational Targets For 2006

Activity	Performance Standard (1)	Performance Achieved
New Claims		
State Pension (Contributory) (2) (3)	55% in 6 weeks	58% Achieved
State Pension (Transition) (2) (3)	80% in 5 weeks	62% Achieved
Widow(er)'s Contributory Pension	80% in 5 weeks	82% Achieved
State Pension (Non-Contributory) (2)	65% in 8 weeks	52% Achieved
Widow(er)'s (Non-Contributory) Pension & One Parent Family Payment (Widow)	75% in 8 weeks	75% Achieved
One-Parent Family – (Local Office based)	85% in 9 weeks	63% Achieved
Free Electricity/Gas Allowance	70% in 7 weeks	83% Achieved
Free Telephone Allowance	70% in 7 weeks	83% Achieved
Bereavement Grant (Social Welfare Services Office, Sligo)	80% in 3 weeks	79% Achieved
Bereavement Grant (Social Welfare Services Office, Longford)	80% in 3 weeks	58% Achieved
Invalidity Pension	70% in 9 weeks	70% Achieved
Family Income Supplement	70% in 3 weeks	18% Achieved
Disability Allowance	70% in 9 weeks	31% Achieved
Carer's Allowance	70% in 9 weeks	41% Achieved
Jobseeker's Benefit (2)	85% in 2 weeks	63% Achieved
Jobseeker's Assistance (2)	70% in 2 weeks	48% Achieved
Illness Benefit (2)	90% in 1 week	82% Achieved
Occupational Injury Benefit - Interim Illness Benefit	85% in 1 week	89% Achieved
Maternity Benefit	80% before commencement of benefit	74% Achieved
Treatment Benefit	90% in 2 weeks	91% Achieved
Child Benefit	90% in 1 week	73% Achieved
Arrears		
Social Welfare Services Office, Sligo	80% in 3 weeks	91% Achieved
Social Welfare Services Office, Longford	80% in 3 weeks	75% Achieved

Notes for Information

- (1) Performance Standard to clear new claims was from date of receipt to date of award.
- (2) Scheme names changed in 2006:
 - Old Age Contributory Pension changed to State Pension (Contributory) from 29/09/06.
 - Retirement Pension changed to State Pension (Transition) from 28/09/06.
 - Old Age Non-Contributory Pension changed to State Pension (Non-Contributory) from 29/09/06.
 - Unemployment Benefit changed to Jobseeker's Benefit from 05/10/06.
 - Unemployment Assistance changed to Jobseeker's Assistance from 04/10/06
 - Disability Benefit changed to Illness Benefit from 02/10/06.
- (3) Measured only for the period from January to April 2006.

Appendix 2: Summary Of DSFA Budget Package 2007

	COST	
	First Year €m	Full Year €m
Delivering Income Support	940.85	940.85
Children	209.23	243.70
Pensioners	38.16	38.40
Energy	35.65	35.65
Carers	63.05	107.52
Working Age	15.65	21.04
People with Disabilities	16.48	16.90
Miscellaneous	2.75	2.25
Total	1,321.82	1,406.31

DETAILS OF DSFA BUDGET PACKAGE 2007		
Proposal	COST	
	First Year €m	Full Year €m
1. Income Support		
Personal Rates of Payment		
€16 increase in the personal rate of payment for all contributory pensioners aged 66 or over (65 in the case of Invalidity Pension); €18 increase in the personal rate of payment for all State Pension (Non-Contributory) recipients; €19.10 increase in the personal rate of Death Benefit Pension aged under 66; €20 increase in the personal rate of lower payments. See Section 5 for increases for carers. Proportionate increases for all persons in receipt of reduced rates. [January 2007]		
IQA Rates of Payment		
€14.30 per week Increase for Invalidity Pension QAs aged under 65; €10.70 per week Increase for State Pension (Contributory) and State Pension (Transition) QAs aged under 66; €11.90 per week Increase for State Pension (Non-Contributory) QAs and a €13.30 per week Increase for all other QAs. Proportionate increases for all persons in receipt of reduced rates. See Section 3 for Increases for State Pension (Contributory), State Pension (Transition) and Invalidity Pension QAs aged 65. [January 2007]		
Maternity and Adoptive Benefits		
€25.20 per week increase in the minimum rate of Maternity and Adoptive Benefit from €182.60 to €207.80 per week. [January 2007]		
	940.85	940.85

Appendix 2: Summary Of DSFA Budget Package 2007 (continued)

	COST	
	First Year €m	Full Year €m
2. Children		
Child Benefit Increase the Lower and Higher Child Benefit Rates by €10 per month. New monthly rates are €160 and €195 per month, respectively. . [April 2007]		
Increase for Qualified Children Increase Qualified Child rates by €5.20, €2.70 and €0.40 from €16.80, €19.30 and €21.60, respectively, to a new single rate of €22 per week. [January 2007]		
Family Income Supplement (FIS) Increase all FIS earnings thresholds by amounts ranging from €15 to €185 per week, depending on family size. [January 2007]		
Back to School Clothing & Footwear Allowance (BTSCFA) Increase the rate of payment of BTSCFA by €60 per child for the lower rate and by €95 per child for the higher rate; New rates are €180 for children aged 2 to 11 years old and €285 for children aged 12 to 22. [June 2007]		
School Meals Additional funding to extend the School Meals Programme to a further 215 schools in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) programme. [2007]		
Supplementary Welfare Allowance/ Rent & Mortgage Interest Supplement Disregard Guardian's Payment (Contributory & Non-Contributory) from assessment for Supplementary Welfare Allowance/Rent Mortgage Interest Supplement. [May 2007]		
IQC/Jobseeker's Benefit, Illness Benefit, Injury Benefit and Health & Safety Benefit Increase the spouse's income threshold for entitlement to a half rate Increase for Qualified Children by €50 per week, from €350 to €400 [January 2007]		
Widowed Parent Grant Increase the Widowed Parent Grant by €1,300, from €2,700 to €4,000. [Budget Day]		
	209.23	243.70

Appendix 2: Summary Of DSFA Budget Package 2007 (continued)

	COST	
	First Year €m	Full Year €m
3. Pensioners		
<p>State Pension (Non Contributory) (aged 66 and over). Increase the means disregard by €10 per week, from €20 to €30, for the State Pension (Non-Contributory) and increase the employment earnings disregard by €100 per week, from €100 to €200. [January 2007]</p>		
<p>State Pension (Contributory), State Pension (Transition) and Invalidity Pension IQA (aged 66 and over). Special additional increase of €11.30 per week : Total weekly increase of €23.70 to bring the IQA rate up to €173. [January 2007]</p>		
<p>Pensioners - Rent & Mortgage Interest Supplement Allow pensioners aged 66 or over to retain any additional amount of Pension they receive which is in excess of the SWA Rate. [January 2007]</p>		
<p>Free Travel Extend automatic entitlement to a Free Travel Companion Pass to persons aged 66 to 74 inclusive, who are medically unfit to travel unaccompanied. [March 2007]</p>		
<p>Telephone Allowance Extend Telephone Allowance Scheme to include mobile phones. [April 2007]</p>		
<p>Bereavement Grant Increase the Bereavement Grant by €215, from €635 to €850. [Budget Day]</p>	38.16	38.40
	COST	
	2005 €m	Full Year €m
4. Energy		
<p>National Fuel Scheme Increase the rate of the National Fuel Scheme by €4 per week, from €14 to €18 per week. [January 2007]</p>		
<p>Increase the income threshold for eligibility to Fuel Allowances by €49 per week, from €51 to €100 per week. [January 2007]</p>	35.65	35.65

Appendix 2: Summary of DSFA Budget Package 2007 (continued)

	COST	
	First Year €m	Full Year €m
5. Carers		
<p>Carer's Allowance/Benefit</p> <p>Increase the rate of Carer's Allowance (aged 66 or over) by €18, from €200 to €218 per week and increase the rate of Carer's Allowance (aged under 66) and Carer's Benefit by €20, from €180 to €200 per week.</p> <p>[January 2007]</p>		
<p>Respite Care Grant</p> <p>Increase the rate of Respite Care Grant by €300, from €1,200 to €1,500 for each care recipient.</p> <p>[June 2007]</p>		
<p>Carer's Allowance</p> <p>Increase the Carer's Allowance income disregard from €290 (single)/€580 (couple) per week to €320 (single)/€640 (couple) per week; increases of €30 and €60 per week, respectively.</p> <p>[April 2007]</p>		
<p>Carer's Benefit</p> <p>Increase the earnings threshold for entitlement to Carer's Benefit by €30 per week to €320 per week.</p> <p>[April 2007]</p>		
<p>Half Rate Carer's Allowance</p> <p>Introduce a new payment equivalent to half the Carer's Allowance to certain people with another Social Welfare entitlement.</p> <p>[September 2007]</p>		
	63.05	107.52

Appendix 2: Summary of DSFA Budget Package 2007 (continued)

	COST	
	First Year €m	Full Year €m
6. Working Age		
One Parent Family Payment Increase the upper income threshold for entitlement to One Parent Family Payment by €25 per week, from €375 to €400. [May 2007]		
Jobseeker's Allowance/PRETA/Disability Allowance/Farm Assist 1. Introduce a daily earnings disregard of €20 per day for Jobseeker's Allowance and Farm Assist claimants with children. (for up to 3 days per week). 2. Increase the daily earnings disregard by €7.30 per day, from €12.70 to €20 for Jobseeker's Allowance and Farm Assist claimants without children. 3. Reform and simplify the assessment of spouse's earnings for Jobseeker's Allowance/PRETA/Disability Allowance/Farm Assist so as to reward work. [September 2007]		
Increases for Qualified Adults (IQA's) Increase the upper ceiling for entitlement to tapered IQA payments by €30, from €250 to €280 per week. [January 2007]		
Maternity & Adoptive Benefit Increase the reckonable weekly earnings threshold from €332 to €350, for determination of entitlement to earnings related Maternity and Adoptive Benefits: New maximum rate is €280 per week. [January 2007]		
Rent & Mortgage Interest Supplement Enable recipients of Rent Supplement, who have been placed on a Local Authority waiting list for accommodation under the Rental Accommodation Scheme, to take up full time employment and remain eligible for Rent Supplement, subject to satisfying the other conditions for entitlement. [April 2007] Increase the Rent & Mortgage Interest Supplement additional household income disregard applicable to those taking up part-time employment or an employment opportunity or those in receipt of a maintenance payment to 50% of any additional household income up to €200 per week, subject to a minimum disregard of €75 per household per week. [April 2007]		
Rent & Mortgage Interest Supplement/Supplementary Welfare Allowance Increase the capital disregard for entitlement to Rent & Mortgage Interest Supplement and Supplementary Welfare Allowance from €520 to €5,000 and reform assessment in line with arrangements for other schemes. [April 2007]		
Back to Work Allowance Extend entitlement to Back to Work Allowance to Jobseeker's Allowance recipients who are in receipt of that payment at a weekly rate of less than €50.79 (single) or €78.72 (married). [March 2007]		

Appendix 2: Summary of DSFA Budget Package 2007 (continued)

	COST	
	First Year €m	Full Year €m
6. Working Age (continued)		
Back to Education Allowance Reduce the qualifying period for Back to Education Allowance from 3 to 2 years in respect of Illness Benefit. [September 2007]		
Extend immediate entitlement to Back to Education Allowance to persons made redundant provided they have an entitlement to statutory redundancy i.e. at least 2 years continuous service and are entitled to a social welfare payment. [September 2007]		
Back to Education Programmes Extend entitlement to participation in the Education, Training & Development (ET&D) option of the Back to Education Programmes and receive an Out of Pocket Expenses payment of €32 per week to persons who are eligible for the Back to Education Allowance [May 2007]		
Jobseeker's Benefit Raise the redundancy threshold for disqualification to entitlement to Jobseeker's Benefit for up to 9 weeks by €30,954, from €19,046 to €50,000. [February 2007]		
Illness Benefit and Jobseeker's Benefit Enable a person who was in receipt of Illness Benefit/Jobseeker's Benefit and who subsequently was in receipt of Carer's Allowance or Benefit, to return to Illness Benefit / Jobseeker's Benefit entitlement at the same rate as previously (if more beneficial). [May 2007]		
Enable a person who was in receipt of Illness Benefit for 2 years and who then undertook employment of less than 26 weeks, to return to an Illness Benefit entitlement at the same rate as previously (down from 5 years). [May 2007]		
One Parent Family Payment Reform the provision of credited contributions for recipients of One Parent Family Payment who take time off following the birth of a child. [April 2007]		
Deserted Wife's Benefit Increase the earnings related reduced rates of Deserted Wife's Benefit (1992-1996) to the maximum personal rate subject to a qualifying income threshold of €20,000 and also introduce a transitional payment of half rate Deserted Wife's Benefit for 6 months where a recipient exceeds that income threshold. [May 2007]		
	15.65	21.04

Appendix 2: Summary of DSFA Budget Package 2007 (continued)

	COST	
	First Year €m	Full Year €m
7. People with Disabilities		
Disability Allowance		
Extend entitlement to full rate Disability Allowance to all persons resident in institutions. [January 2007]		
Increase the capital disregard for Disability Allowance by €30,000, from €20,000 to €50,000. [June 2007]		
Advocacy Service for People with Disabilities		
Additional funding for Comhairle for the development of a personal advocacy service for persons with disabilities and for the implementation of the Disability Sectoral Plan. [2007]		
Bereavement Grant		
Extend entitlement to Bereavement Grant to the next of kin of deceased recipients of Disability Allowance aged 16 to 22. [May 2007]		
	16.48	16.90
8. Miscellaneous		
Miscellaneous		
Entitlement Awareness Campaigns. Additional funding for Entitlement Awareness Campaigns. [2007]		
Family Support Agency		
Additional funding for the Family Support Agency for marriage, child and bereavement counselling and other services. [2007]		
Carers' Associations		
Once off grants for carers' associations. [2007]		
	2.75	2.25
Overall Total	1321.82	1406.31

Appendix 3: Expenditure on Social Welfare by Payment Type

Type of Payment	2005 €000	2006 Provisional €000	Change %
State Pension (Contributory)	1,152,849	1,293,702	12.2%
State Pension (Transition)	1,060,052	1,144,636	8.0%
State Pension (Non Con)	631,299	727,767	15.3%
Pre-Retirement Allowance	102,879	113,036	9.9%
Total State Pension	2,947,079	3,279,141	11.3%
Widow/er's (Contributory) Pension	998,524	1,094,969	9.7%
Widow/er's (Non-Contributory) Pension	126,944	103,684	-18.3%
Deserted Wife's Benefit	90,620	94,637	4.4%
Deserted Wife's Allowance	11,468	10,545	-8.0%
Prisoner's Wife's Allowance	14	13	-7.1%
One Parent Family Payment	751,102	834,214	11.1%
Widowed Parent Grant (Contributory)	3,304	2,942	-11.0%
Widowed Parent Grant (Non-Contributory)	269	282	4.8%
Total Widows, Widowers and One Parent Families	1,982,245	2,141,286	8.0%
Maternity Benefit	132,412	180,825	36.6%
Health and Safety Benefit	293	352	20.1%
Adoptive Benefit	709	818	15.4%
Guardian's Payment (Contributory)	7,516	8,799	17.1%
Guardian's Payment (Non-Contributory)	4,096	4,832	18.0%
Child Benefit	1,899,936	2,056,288	8.2%
Total Child Related Payments	2,044,962	2,251,914	10.1%
Illness Benefit	540,245	627,724	16.2%
Invalidity Pension	548,285	602,421	9.9%
Injury Benefit	14,231	16,127	13.3%
Disablement Benefit	67,026	72,530	8.2%
Death Benefit	6,523	7,047	8.0%
Disability Allowance	630,728	738,426	17.1%
Medical Care	298	292	-2.0%
Carer's Allowance	223,059	284,574	27.6%
Carer's Benefit	9,588	16,681	74.0%
Respite Care Grant	34,302	50,458	47.1%
Blind Pension	16,661	16,963	1.8%
Total Illness, Disability and Caring	2,090,946	2,433,243	16.4%

Appendix 3: Expenditure on Social Welfare by Payment Type (continued)

Type of Payment	2005 €000	2006 Provisional €000	Change %
Jobseeker's Benefit	418,085	454,742	8.8%
Jobseeker's Allowance	667,483	768,717	15.2%
Total Unemployment Supports	1,085,568	1,223,459	12.7%
Family Income Supplement	72,152	107,126	48.5%
Employment Support Services	106,613	115,541	8.4%
Farm Assist	67,284	71,085	5.6%
Total Employment Supports	246,049	293,752	19.4%
Supplementary Welfare Allowance	624,029	635,195	1.8%
Total Supplementary Welfare Allowance	624,029	635,195	1.8%
Treatment Benefits	65,497	95,020	45.1%
Rent Allowance	855	839	-1.9%
Free Schemes	383,429	444,429	15.9%
Miscellaneous	89,751	102,828	14.6%
Equal Treatment - Insurance payments	-	-	-
Equal Treatment- Assistance payments	-	-	-
Redundancy and Insolvency (1)	150,348	172,294	14.6%
Total Miscellaneous Payments and Grants	689,880	815,410	18.2%
Administration - Insurance Schemes	202,580	221,684	9.4%
Administration - Assistance Schemes	256,331	295,568	15.3%
Total Administration	458,911	517,252	12.7%
Grand Total	12,169,669	13,590,652	11.7%

(1) These schemes are administered by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment.

APPENDIX 4: LEGISLATION ENACTED IN 2006

Legislation Enacted in 2006

The Department's Legislation Programme for 2006 encompassed the enactment of two pieces of primary legislation, that is:

- the Social Welfare Law Reform and Pensions Act 2006, and
- the Social Welfare Act 2006.

The Programme also entailed the promulgation of 26 Statutory Instruments.

Details of the primary and secondary legislation are as follows:

SOCIAL WELFARE LAW REFORM AND PENSIONS ACT 2006

(No. 8 of 2006 enacted 24 March 2006)

This Act provides for a number of measures announced in Budget 2006, including increases in Child Benefit and the Respite Care Grant, raising the income threshold for the One-Parent Family Payment, the extension of the duration of Carer's Benefit, and an improvement in the means test applicable to the Supplementary Welfare Allowance scheme.

It also provides for the establishment of a standard non-contributory support payment for persons aged over 66 years - the State Pension (Non-Contributory) and the automatic transfer to Old Age (Contributory) Pension for recipients of Invalidity Pension or Retirement Pension on reaching age 66. The Act further provides for the amendment of the titles of some schemes operated under social welfare legislation, and for a number of amendments to the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005.

The Act contains the legislative basis for the payment of the Early Childcare Supplement as announced in Budget 2006, and to exempt this payment from assessment as taxable income.

The Act also provides for a number of amendments to the Pensions Act 1990 in relation to Occupational Pensions.

This Act further contains provision for amendments to a number of other Acts, including the Carer's Leave Act, the Freedom of Information Act, the Taxes Consolidation Act and the Combat Poverty Agency Act.

SOCIAL WELFARE ACT 2006

(No. 36 of 2006 enacted 19 December 2006)

The Act provides for the Budget 2007 increases in the rates of social insurance and social assistance payments and improvements in Family Income Supplement, Maternity and Adoptive Benefit, Death Benefit Funeral Expenses Grant, Bereavement Grant, Widowed Parent Grant, State Pension (Non-Contributory) and Disability Allowance schemes.

It also provides for raising the weekly earnings limit at which PRSI becomes payable, an increase in the income ceiling above which PRSI contributions are not payable by employed or optional contributors, as announced in the Budget, in addition to changes to the Health Contributions Act 1979 to provide for an increase in the amount of contributions payable for earnings over a certain threshold. It also provides for an increase in the weekly and annual exemption thresholds for the Health Contribution Levy.

S.I. 70 of 2006

OCCUPATIONAL PENSION SCHEMES (REVALUATION) REGULATIONS, 2006

Section 33 of the Pensions Act, 1990 (as amended by Section 21 of the Pensions (Amendment) Act, 2002), provides that the Minister for Social and Family Affairs, after consultation with the Minister for Finance, shall, in respect of each revaluation year, make Regulations specifying the percentage which shall determine the amount by which the preserved benefit is to be increased by in that year.

This Regulation provides for a revaluation percentage of 2.5% for 2005.

S.I. No. 119 of 2006

**SOCIAL WELFARE ACT 2005 (SECTIONS 7 and 8)
(COMMENCEMENT) ORDER 2006**

This Order provides for the commencement of Sections 7(1)(a)(ii), 7(1)(a)(iii), 7(1)(b), 7(2) and 8(1)(a)(i) of the Social Welfare Act 2005 which provide for the extension of the duration of payment of Maternity Benefit and Adoptive Benefit consequential on Budget 2006. These Regulations come into effect from 1 March 2006.

S.I. No. 120 of 2006

SOCIAL WELFARE (CONSOLIDATED PAYMENTS PROVISIONS) (AMENDMENT)(BENEFIT AND PRIVILEGE) REGULATIONS 2006

The Regulations provide for an improvement in the assessment of benefit and privilege for Unemployment Assistance and Pre-Retirement Allowance. The assessment of benefit and privilege will be abolished for those aged 25 years and over living in the parental home with effect from 1 February, 2006.

S.I. No. 145 of 2006

SOCIAL WELFARE (CONSOLIDATED PAYMENTS PROVISIONS) (AMENDMENT) (No. 2) (CARER'S) REGULATIONS 2006

Social Welfare legislation currently provides that a person in receipt of Carer's Benefit may engage in employment or self-employment outside the home, subject to a maximum of ten hours per week and an income ceiling of €270. Article 4(a) of these Regulations increases the income ceiling to €290 per week, effective from 6 April, 2006.

These Regulations further provide for an increase in the income disregarded for the purposes of Carer's Allowance. In the case of a single person, the increase is €20 per week, bringing the total amount of the disregard to €290. In the case of a married person, the disregard is increased by €40 per week, to a new total of €580. These changes take effect from 6 April 2006.

S.I. No. 146 of 2006

SOCIAL WELFARE (CONSOLIDATED SUPPLEMENTARY WELFARE ALLOWANCE) (AMENDMENT) (DIET SUPPLEMENT) REGULATIONS 2006

These Regulations provide for revised rates of Diet Supplement under the Supplementary Welfare Allowance Scheme. The Regulations streamline the range of specified diets under the scheme and extend the scope of the scheme to certain qualified child dependants aged 18 or over and under 22 in full-time education.

The Regulations come into operation for new claimants with effect from 3 April 2006.

S.I. No. 147 of 2006

SOCIAL WELFARE (CONSOLIDATED PAYMENTS PROVISIONS) (AMENDMENT) (No. 1) (EARLY CHILDCARE SUPPLEMENT) REGULATIONS 2006

These Regulations set out the dates on which Early Childcare Supplement will be payable, for the period April to December 2006.

The Regulations also:

- Provide for the disregard the Early Childcare Supplement in determining the weekly family income for the purposes of Family Income Supplement;
- Include Early Childcare Supplement in the definition of benefit, for the purposes of claims and payments provisions;
- Determine the first day of the quarter in which a child is born as being the date from which Early Childcare Supplement becomes payable;
- Provide that the maximum period for which Early Childcare Supplement may be backdated is 6 months;
- In cases of shared custody of a qualified child who resides on a part-time basis with each of his or her parents, Early Childcare Supplement is payable to the parent with whom the child resides for the greater part of the quarter, and
- Require recipients of Early Childcare Supplement to return any payments not due as a result of a change in their circumstances.

S.I. 169 of 2006

SOCIAL WELFARE LAW REFORM AND PENSIONS ACT 2006 (SECTION 39 (in so far as it inserts section 3B into the Pensions Act 1990)) (COMMENCEMENT) ORDER, 2006

This Order provides for the commencement of section 39 of the Social Welfare Law Reform and Pensions Act 2006, in so far as it inserts section 3B into the Pensions Act 1990, with effect from 12 April 2006.

The new section 3B relates to the proceedings which the Pensions Board may bring for a summary offence under the Pensions Act and provides that certain documentary evidence submitted in a prosecution is now admissible without the need for the officer of the Pensions Board to attend the Court proceedings.

S.I. No. 199 of 2006

SOCIAL WELFARE (CONSOLIDATED PAYMENTS PROVISIONS) (AMENDMENT) (No. 3) (ISLAND ALLOWANCE) REGULATIONS 2006

These Regulations provide for the addition of Fenit Island in Co. Kerry and Islandmore in Co. Mayo to the list of prescribed islands for the purposes of the Island Allowance payable to certain social welfare recipients who are normally resident on those islands.

S.I. No. 200 of 2006

SOCIAL WELFARE (CONSOLIDATED PAYMENTS PROVISIONS) (AMENDMENT) (No. 4) (ASSESSMENT OF MAINTENANCE) REGULATIONS 2006

These Regulations provide for an increase in the income disregard for those receiving maintenance from a liable relative. For the purpose of deciding entitlement to a rent or mortgage interest supplement, the first €95.23 per week of maintenance is assessed in full, any maintenance between €95.23 per week and €155.23 per week is disregarded, with half of any maintenance from €155.23 per week up to a maximum of €185.23 per week also disregarded.

S.I. No. 201 of 2006

SOCIAL WELFARE (CONSOLIDATED PAYMENTS PROVISIONS) (AMENDMENT) (No. 5) (TREATMENT BENEFIT) REGULATIONS 2006

These Regulations provide for the introduction of an alternative contribution condition for entitlement to Treatment Benefit. A person over 21 will now be able to avail of Treatment Benefit where he or she has 26 qualifying contributions in each of the second and third last contribution years.

S.I. No. 202 of 2006

SOCIAL WELFARE (CONSOLIDATED PAYMENTS PROVISIONS) (AMENDMENT)(NO. 7) (MATERNITY AND ADOPTIVE BENEFIT) REGULATIONS 2006

These Regulations provide for a number of amendments to the regulations governing Maternity Benefit and extend the period of payment of Maternity Benefit by 4 weeks, consequential on the extension of paid Maternity Leave, as announced in Budget 2006.

The Adoptive Leave Act 2005 amended the provisions governing Adoptive Leave by providing that the continuous period of Adoptive Leave may be postponed where the child is hospitalised.

These Regulations allow for Adoptive Benefit to be postponed in the event of the hospitalisation of the child subject to:

- an application to postpone payment being made in writing, and
- payment resuming within seven days following written notification of the discharge of the child from hospital.
- Payment will then continue until completion of the period of entitlement to benefit.

S.I. No. 203 of 2006

**SOCIAL WELFARE (CONSOLIDATED
SUPPLEMENTARY WELFARE ALLOWANCE)
(AMENDMENT) (No. 1) (TRAINING COURSE
DISREGARD, BENEFIT AND PRIVILEGE)
REGULATIONS 2006**

These Regulations provide for an increase in the income disregard for those attending certain training courses, for the purposes of the Supplementary Welfare Allowance scheme. The first €60 per week of additional income is disregarded, with half of any additional income between €60 per week and €90 per week also disregarded.

The Regulations also provide for an improvement in the scheme, by providing for the abolition of the assessment of benefit and privilege for persons aged 25 years living in the parental home, with effect from 24 April 2006.

S.I. No. 204 of 2006

**SOCIAL WELFARE (CONSOLIDATED CONTRIBUTIONS
AND INSURABILITY) (AMENDMENT) (No. 1)
(REFUNDS) REGULATIONS 2006**

These Regulations provide for refunds, to employers, of social insurance contributions relating to sea-going employees paid in respect of employees on wholly or mainly Irish-owned and registered ships, ships leased in the State or any EU registered vessel.

These Regulations further provide for an extension of the refund provisions from 1 January 2004 to 31 December 2010.

S.I. No. 205 of 2006

**SOCIAL WELFARE LAW REFORM AND PENSIONS
ACT 2006 (SECTIONS 5 and 6) (COMMENCEMENT)
ORDER 2006**

This Order provides for the commencement of Sections 5 and 6 of the Social Welfare Law Reform and Pensions Act 2006 which provide that income earned by a home childminder, in accordance with section 216C of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997, will be liable for a single self-employment social insurance contribution of €253 per annum. These Regulations come into effect from 1 January 2006.

S.I. No. 206 of 2006

**SOCIAL WELFARE LAW REFORM AND
PENSIONS ACT 2006 (SECTIONS 26 and 27)
(COMMENCEMENT) ORDER 2006**

This Order provides for the commencement of Sections 26 and 27 of the Social Welfare Law Reform and Pensions Act 2006.

Section 26 provides for a technical amendment to clarify that it is the means of an orphan which are assessed when determining entitlement to Orphan's (Non-Contributory) Pension.

Section 27 raises the maximum income limit for recipients of One-Parent Family Payment to €375 from €293.

S.I. No. 218 of 2006

**SOCIAL WELFARE (CONSOLIDATED
CONTRIBUTIONS AND INSURABILITY)
(AMENDMENT) (CHARGEABLE EXCESS)
REGULATIONS 2006**

These Regulations amend the Social Welfare (Consolidated Contributions and Insurability) Regulations to provide for exemption from PRSI of a chargeable excess as defined in Section 787Q of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997.

S.I. No. 219 of 2006

**SOCIAL WELFARE (CONSOLIDATED PAYMENTS
PROVISIONS) (AMENDMENT)(No. 6) QUALIFIED
ADULTS AND EARNINGS FROM REHABILITATIVE
EMPLOYMENT) REGULATIONS 2006**

These Regulations increase the limit for entitlement to the full-rate of Qualified Adult Allowance by €11.12, from €88.88 to €100.00 per week.

These Regulations also increase the spouse earnings disregard, for the purposes of Unemployment Assistance, Pre-Retirement Allowance, Farm Assist and Disability Allowance, by €11.12, from €88.88 to €100.00 per week, where the spouse works more than 3 days in the week, and by €11.91, from €38.09 to €50.00 per week, where the spouse works 3 days or less in the week. These Regulations further provide for increases in the rates of tapered payments in respect of Qualified Adults.

These Regulations retain the income disregard, for recipients of Disability Allowance and Blind Pension, of €120 per week for earnings of a rehabilitative nature, and introduce a new withdrawal rate thereafter of 50% up to an upper maximum earnings limit of €50.00 per week.

S.I. No. 246 of 2006

SOCIAL WELFARE LAW REFORM AND PENSIONS ACT 2006 (SECTIONS 4(4), 4(5), 31 and 33) (COMMENCEMENT) ORDER 2006

This Order provides for the commencement of Sections 4(4), 4(5), 31 and 33 of the Social Welfare Law Reform and Pensions Act 2006.

Section 4 of the Act provides for amending the titles of certain social welfare payments to make the social welfare system more accessible to its customers and to reflect the purposes of the schemes. Sections 4(4) and 4(5) provide for changing the title of the Orphan's (Contributory) Allowance and Orphan's (Non-Contributory) Pension to Guardian's Payment (Contributory) and Guardian's Payment (Non-Contributory) respectively.

Section 31 provides for the disregard of the amount of any contributions to Personal Retirement Savings Accounts (PRSAs) for the purposes of the income thresholds applicable to the Family Income Supplement Scheme.

Section 33 provides for amendments to the definitions contained in Schedule 3 to the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005, which contains the Rules which are applied in assessing means for the purposes of certain social welfare schemes. The Section further provides for the exclusion of certain payments, including the Early Childcare Supplement, the Home Tuition Scheme and the Home Care Grant, from the means test. It also provides for the disregard of the amount of any contributions to PRSA for the purposes of the means-tested schemes.

S.I. No. 288 of 2006

SOCIAL WELFARE (CONSOLIDATED PAYMENTS PROVISIONS) (AMENDMENT)(No. 8) (CARERS AND HOMEMAKERS) REGULATIONS 2006

For the purposes of Carer's Benefit, Carer's Allowance and Respite Care Grant, Social Welfare legislation currently provides that a carer, who has made appropriate care arrangements, may engage in employment and for Respite Care Grant purposes, self-employment, for a maximum of 10 hours per week and still be considered to be providing full-time care and attention to the care recipient.

These Regulations amend the legislation to provide that the care-giver may engage, outside the home, in employment, self-employment or participate in training or education courses approved by the Minister, for an aggregated maximum of 15 hours per week.

These Regulations also provide for the extension of the time limit within which an application to become a homemaker for the purposes of Old Age (Contributory) Pension may be made. The new registration deadline for an applicant who commenced homemaking during the period 6 April 1994 to 31 December 2006, is 31 December 2007.

S.I. 291 of 2006

SOCIAL WELFARE LAW REFORM AND PENSIONS ACT 2006 (PART 3) (COMMENCEMENT) ORDER, 2006

The order provides for the commencement, with effect from 24 May 2006 of the following provisions of Part 3 of the Social Welfare Law Reform and Pensions Act 2006 –

- Section 38 which provides for the definitions used in Part 3 of the Act
- Section 41 amends part IV of the Pensions Act to provide that in the case of an occupational pensions scheme, which provides increases in pensions linked to an index, the actuary to the scheme may assume a fixed rate increase will apply when calculating the liabilities of the scheme for the purposes of the funding standard or in calculating the liabilities of a

scheme that is winding up and which is under-funded.

- Section 43 which provides for an amendment to section 131 of the Pensions Act in relation to the functions of the Pensions Ombudsman and the operation of the Internal Dispute Resolution.
- Section 44 of the Act in so far as it relates to items 1,2,3,4,5,7,8,9 and 10 of Schedule 8 to the Act

S.I. 292 of 2006

OCCUPATIONAL PENSION SCHEMES (CROSS-BORDER) REGULATIONS 2006

These Regulations revoke and replace Regulation 592 of 2005.

Recent case law in Ireland has suggested that a provision of domestic legislation cannot be used for the purposes of implementing EC law unless it is clear that such delegated legislation is clearly authorised by the primary legislation. To this end, section 5 of the Pensions Act 1990 was amended by section 44 of the Social Welfare Law Reform and Pensions Act, 2006 to expressly state that regulations made under the Pensions Act may be used to implement law. Regulation 592 of 2005 was made under section 3 of the European Communities Act 1972 due to uncertainty with regard to using the powers under the Pensions Act. However, now that those powers have been clarified these regulations are now being re made under the Pensions Act powers.

S.I. 293 of 2006

OCCUPATIONAL PENSION SCHEMES (TRUSTEE) REGULATIONS 2006

Recent case law in Ireland has suggested that a provision of domestic legislation cannot be used for the purposes of implementing EC law unless it is clear that such delegated legislation is clearly authorised by the primary legislation. To this end, section 5 of the Pensions Act 1990 was amended by section 44 of the Social Welfare Law Reform and Pensions Act, 2006 to expressly state that regulations made under the Pensions Act may be used to implement EC law. Regulation 594 of 2005 was made under section 3 of the European Communities Act 1972 due to uncertainty with regard to using the powers under the Pensions

Act. However, now that those powers have been clarified these regulations are now being re made under the Pensions Act powers.

S.I. 294 of 2006

OCCUPATIONAL PENSION SCHEMES (INVESTMENT) REGULATIONS, 2006

Recent case law in Ireland has suggested that a provision of domestic legislation cannot be used for the purposes of implementing EC law unless it is clear that such delegated legislation is clearly authorised by the primary legislation. To this end, section 5 of the Pensions Act 1990 was amended by section 44 of the Social Welfare Law Reform and Pensions Act, 2006 to expressly state that regulations made under the Pensions Act may be used to implement EC law. Regulation 593 of 2005 was made under section 3 of the European Communities Act 1972 due to uncertainty with regard to using the powers under the Pensions Act. However, now that those powers have been clarified these regulations are now being re made under the Pensions Act powers.

S.I. 295 of 2006

OCCUPATIONAL PENSION SCHEMES (FUNDING STANDARD) (AMENDMENT) REGULATIONS, 2006

Recent case law in Ireland has suggested that a provision of domestic legislation cannot be used for the purposes of implementing EC law unless it is clear that such delegated legislation is clearly authorised by the primary legislation. To this end, section 5 of the Pensions Act 1990 was amended by section 44 of the Social Welfare Law Reform and Pensions Act, 2006 to expressly state that regulations made under the Pensions Act may be used to implement EC law. As these Regulations implement some aspects of Directive 2003/41 on the activities and supervision of occupational pensions, Regulations 595 of 2005 are now being re made under the appropriate Pensions Act powers including the amended section 5.

S.I. 301 of 2006

OCCUPATIONAL PENSION SCHEMES (DISCLOSURE OF INFORMATION) REGULATIONS, 2006

Recent case law in Ireland has suggested that a provision of domestic legislation cannot be used

for the purposes of implementing EC law unless it is clear that such delegated legislation is clearly authorised by the primary legislation. To this end, section 5 of the Pensions Act 1990 was amended by section 44 of the Social Welfare Law Reform and Pensions Act, 2006 to expressly state that regulations made under the Pensions Act may be used to implement law. As these Regulations implement some aspects of Directive 2003/41 on the activities and supervision of occupational pensions, Regulations 633 of 2005 are now being remade under the appropriate Pensions Act powers including the amended section 5. There are some minor changes to the Regulations as promulgated in 2005

S.I. 302 of 2006

PENSION OMBUDSMAN REGULATIONS, 2006

These Regulations amend the Pensions Ombudsman Regulations (S.I. No. 397 of 2003) to –

- (a) take account of changes made in relation to redress provisions in Part VII of the Act (Equal Pensions Treatment) whereby complaints relating to equal pension treatment are no longer submitted to the Pensions Board but rather to the Director of the Equality Tribunal, and
- (b) clarify that an IDR procedure is exhausted within its terms at the expiry of the three month period from when all the particulars of the complaint have been furnished, or where the Ombudsman considers it appropriate at a later date to be specified by him.

S.I. No. 334 of 2006

SOCIAL WELFARE LAW REFORM AND PENSIONS ACT 2006 (SECTIONS 4, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24 and 25) (COMMENCEMENT) ORDER 2006

This Order provides for the commencement of Sections 4, 9, 10 to 14 and 16 to 25 of the Social Welfare Law Reform and Pensions Act 2006.

Section 4 provides for amending the titles of certain social welfare payments including re-naming:

- Orphan's (Contributory) Allowance and Orphan's (Non-Contributory) Pension as Guardian's Payment (Contributory) and Guardian's Payment (Non-Contributory) respectively, effective from 28th July, 2006,
- Retirement Pension as State Pension (Transition), effective from 28th September, 2006,
- Old Age (Contributory) Pension as State Pension (Contributory), effective from 29th September, 2006,
- Disability Benefit as Illness Benefit, effective from 2nd October, 2006,
- Unemployability Supplement as Incapacity Supplement, effective from 2nd October, 2006,
- Unemployment Assistance as Jobseeker's Allowance, effective from 4th October, 2006, and
- Unemployment Benefit as Jobseeker's Benefit, effective from 5th October, 2006.

Sections 9 to 14 provide for the automatic transfer from Invalidity Pension or Retirement Pension to Old Age (Contributory) Pension when the recipient reaches the age of 66 and for the associated changes required in the calculation and rounding of payment rates. These provisions take effect from 28th September, 2006.

Section 16 provides the legislative basis for the establishment of the State Pension (Non-Contributory) scheme, with effect from the 29th September, 2006. This will provide a standard non-contributory pension scheme, based on a means test applicable to all the Department's customers over 66 years of age. The means disregard will increase from €7.60 to €20.00 per week, and provision is made to allow for an earnings disregard of €100.00 per week.

Sections 17 to 25 provide for a number of consequential amendments which are required on foot of the introduction of the State Pension (Non-Contributory) including:

- Provision that Widowed Parent Grant may continue to be paid to a widow or widower who is in receipt of the new State Pension (Non-Contributory),
- Providing that Blind Pension, Widow's and Widower's (Non-Contributory) Pension, and

One-Parent Family Payment will no longer be payable after age 66. A similar provision is made in respect of those who have continued entitlement to the Deserted Wife's Allowance and Prisoner's Wife's Allowance schemes, and

- A new schedule containing the Rules governing the means test which will apply to the State Pension (Non-Contributory) and related amendments to the means provisions governing the existing long-term payments.

S.I. 357 of 2006

SOCIAL WELFARE LAW REFORM AND PENSIONS ACT 2006 (ITEM 6 OF SCHEDULE 8) (COMMENCEMENT) ORDER, 2006

The order provides for the commencement, with effect from 30 June 2006 of Item 6 of Schedule 8 of the Social Welfare Law Reform and Pensions Act 2006.

Section 55 of the Pensions Act requires trustees of a scheme to prepare an annual report containing such information as may be prescribed. Subsection 55(2) exempts schemes, which have commenced winding up, from this requirement. Paragraph (a) of item 6 of Schedule 8 amends subsection 55(2) to provide that, where the Pensions Board considers it necessary, certain schemes in wind-up will be required to produce an annual report.

Section 55(4) and (5) of the Pensions Act provide for the inclusion of a statement in the annual report by the scheme actuary, as to whether he or she is satisfied that an under-funded scheme will be in a position to meet its liabilities no later than the effective date of the next actuarial funding certificate. Item 6 amends this provision to provide that where an extension to the date on which the next actuarial funding certificate is due has been granted by the Pensions Board under section 49(3) of the Pensions Act, it shall apply to that later date.

S.I. 437 of 2006

SOCIAL WELFARE LAW REFORM AND PENSIONS ACT 2006 (Section 40) (COMMENCEMENT) ORDER, 2006

This Order provides for the commencement of section 40 of the Social Welfare Law Reform and Pensions Act 2006 with effect from 24th July 2006.

Section 40 inserts a new section 26A into the Pensions Act to provide that the Minister may, in consultation with the Minister for Finance, indemnify the Pensions Board members and the staff of the Board against liability for damages or costs where they have discharged their functions in good faith.

S.I. No. 486 of 2006

SOCIAL WELFARE (CONSOLIDATED PAYMENTS PROVISIONS) (AMENDMENT) (No. 9) (ONE-PARENT FAMILY PAYMENT) (ASSESSMENT OF EARNINGS) REGULATIONS 2006

These Regulations provide for an annual assessment of means from employment and self-employment for the purposes of deciding entitlement to One-Parent Family Payment. In determining entitlement, the gross annual earnings from the last complete tax year are divided by 52 in order to arrive at a weekly assessment. Provision is also made to determine entitlement based on an alternative period where deemed appropriate by a Deciding Officer or an Appeals Officer, as the case may be.

S.I. No. 487 of 2006

SOCIAL WELFARE (CONSOLIDATED PAYMENTS PROVISIONS) (AMENDMENT) (No. 10) (TREATMENT BENEFIT) REGULATIONS 2006

These Regulations provide for an amendment to the alternative contribution conditions for entitlement to Treatment Benefit, with effect from 29 May, 2006. A person who attains age 66 on or after 29 May, 2006 will be able to avail of Treatment Benefit where he or she has 26 qualifying contributions in both the relevant contribution year and the year immediately before the relevant contribution year.

S.I. No. 497 of 2006

SOCIAL WELFARE (CONSOLIDATED PAYMENTS PROVISIONS) (AMENDMENT) (No. 11) (COMPENSATION PAYMENTS) REGULATIONS 2006

Regulations currently provide that any moneys received by way of compensation awarded to persons -

- who have contracted Hepatitis C or HIV,
- who have disabilities caused by Thalidomide, and
- by the Residential Institutions Redress Board

will be disregarded in the assessment of means for social assistance purposes.

These Regulations replace the existing provisions to extend this disregard to include any moneys received by a way of compensation awarded under the provisions of the Health (Repayment Scheme) Act 2006.

S.I. No. 519 of 2006

SOCIAL WELFARE (CONSOLIDATED PAYMENTS PROVISIONS) (AMENDMENT) (No. 12) (STATE AND WIDOW(ER)'S PENSION (NON-CONTRIBUTORY) EARNINGS DISREGARD) REGULATIONS 2006

These Regulations provide for the disregard of €100 per week in earnings from employment when calculating means for the purposes of the State Pension (Non-Contributory), Widow's (Non-Contributory) Pension and Widower's (Non-Contributory) Pension. In addition, Health Contributions, Superannuation Contributions and Trade Union Membership Contributions are also disregarded from gross earnings for the purposes of the means test.

S.I. 567 of 2006

PERSONAL RETIREMENT SAVINGS ACCOUNTS (DISCLOSURE) (AMENDMENT) REGULATIONS, 2006

The Regulations amend the Personal Retirement Savings Account (Disclosure) Regulations 2002 to provide that the rate of return used in the Preliminary Disclosure Certificate and the Statement of Reasonable Projection shall be not more than 6% per annum.

S.I. No. 571 of 2006

SOCIAL WELFARE (CONSOLIDATED PAYMENTS PROVISIONS) (AMENDMENT) (NO. 13) (MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS) REGULATIONS 2006

These Regulations provide for a number of amendments to the Social Welfare (Consolidated Claims and Payments Provisions) Regulations 1994 (as amended) in advance of further consolidation later this year. In the main, the amendments contained in these Regulations replicate provisions in force in other Statutory Instruments. These Regulations will facilitate, upon completion of consolidation, the production of a single, accessible and coherent document, containing provisions relating to scheme claims, payments and control, set out in Statutory Instruments, applicable to the Social Welfare Code.

Article 4 provides for minor technical amendments consequential on the alignment of the income tax and calendar years.

Article 5 provides for the amendment of obsolete terms by replacing the word "handicapped" with "disabled" or "restricted" where appropriate.

Articles 6, 7 and 25 provide for restructuring of the Schedules appended to the Regulations in addition to a consequential technical amendment.

Article 8 incorporates the "Rules of Behaviour" currently contained in Schedule A into the main text of the Regulations. Accordingly, Schedule A is deleted.

Article 9 provides for the substitution of certain monetary amounts with their Euro equivalent.

Articles 10 and 11 provide for the extension of the maximum period, from 4 weeks to 8 weeks, for which Maternity Benefit may be paid in the event of resumption of postponed maternity leave and clarify the conditions regarding disqualification for Maternity Benefit.

Article 12 clarifies that, for the purposes of Adoptive Benefit, the average reckonable weekly earnings, reckonable emoluments and reckonable

weekly income in the relevant tax year shall be used to determine the weekly rate of benefit.

Article 13 provides for the deletion of obsolete articles 35, 67AA, 67AB, 67AC, 71 and 86C(2).

Articles 14 and 15 incorporate the “Rules of Behaviour” currently contained in Schedules F and O into the main text of the Regulations. Accordingly, Schedules F and O are deleted.

Article 16 restructures the existing provisions of Chapter 7 - Miscellaneous Provisions for Assessment of Means - to reflect the recent update to the provisions governing the assessment of means in the Social Welfare Acts.

Article 17 clarifies the provisions for back-dating claims in cases where incapacity and force majeure provisions are applied. Currently, a person who suffers from an incapacity or force majeure may avail of the late claims provisions when he or she recovers from the incapacity or where the force majeure ceases. This amendment clarifies that where the incapacity does not cease or where the force majeure continues to apply the applicant for benefit may also avail of the late claims provisions.

Article 18 extends the time limit, from 3 months to 6 months, for receiving Child Benefit claims in respect of additional children.

Articles 19 and 20 provide, in relation to Early Childcare Supplement (i) that the right to payment will be extinguished if it is not encashed within 6 months and (ii) extends the loss of purchasing power provisions to this scheme.

Article 21 provides, in **Schedule 16**, for the list of prescribed islands, for the purpose of the Island Allowance payment.

Article 22 provides for the introduction of a new Part 9 in the consolidated Regulations to include the control provisions currently contained in the Social Welfare (Miscellaneous Control Provisions) Regulations 1997 (S.I. No. 155 of 1997), as amended.

Article 23 provides for the insertion of a new Part 10 in the consolidated Regulations to encompass

the provisions governing overpayments currently contained in the Social Welfare (Recovery of Overpayments) Regulations 2005 (S.I. No 349 of 2005).

Article 24 inserts a new Part 11 in the consolidated Regulations to include the liable relative provisions currently contained in the Social Welfare (Liable Relative) Regulations 1999 (S.I. No. 138 of 1999), as amended.

Article 26 lists the Statutory Instruments to be revoked by these regulations.

S.I. No. 572 of 2006

SOCIAL WELFARE (CONSOLIDATED SUPPLEMENTARY WELFARE ALLOWANCE) (AMENDMENT) (No. 2) (MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS) REGULATIONS 2006

These Regulations provide for amendments to the conditions for entitlement to Rent Supplement payable under the Supplementary Welfare Allowance scheme.

The Regulations provide that rent supplement may not be payable in cases where a housing authority is not satisfied that the accommodation meets the standards for rented houses as provided for in Regulations made under the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions Act) 1992.

Regulations currently provide that Disability Allowance, Invalidity Pension or Blind Pension are qualifying payments for the purposes of Rent Supplement. These Regulations provide that equivalent payments made by EU Member States and countries with which Ireland has a reciprocal social security agreement will also be treated as qualifying payments for the purposes of Rent Supplement.

These Regulations also provide for two technical amendments. The first relates to the provisions governing the diet supplement provided under the Supplementary Welfare Allowance scheme and the second inserts an article relating to the assessment of non-cash benefits previously provided for under separate regulations.

Regulations currently provide that any moneys received by way of compensation awarded to persons -

- who have contracted Hepatitis C or HIV,
- who have disabilities caused by Thalidomide, and
- by the Residential Institutions Redress Board

will be disregarded in the assessment of means for Supplementary Welfare Allowance purposes.

These Regulations replace the existing provisions to extend this disregard to include any moneys received by a way of compensation awarded under the provisions of the Health (Repayment Scheme) Act 2006.

S.I. No. 580 of 2006

SOCIAL WELFARE (TEMPORARY PROVISIONS) REGULATIONS 2006

These Regulations provide for the payment of a Christmas Bonus to long term social welfare recipients, equivalent to 100% of their normal weekly payments, subject to a minimum payment of €30.

The bonus payment applies to recipients of

- Blind Pension,
- Carer's Allowance,
- Carer's Benefit
- Death Benefit by way of pension,
- Disability Allowance,
- Disablement Pension,
- Farm Assist.
- Guardians Payment (Contributory and Non-Contributory),
- Invalidity Pension,
- Jobseeker's Allowance in respect of a continuous period of unemployment of at least 15 months,
- One-parent Family Payment,
- Pre-Retirement Allowance,
- Relevant payments under section 178(1) of the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005 (formerly Deserted Wife's Benefit and Allowance and Prisoner's Wife's Allowance),
- State Pension (Contributory and Non-Contributory),
- State Pension (Transition),

- Widow's and Widower's (Contributory) Pension, and
- Widow's and Widower's (Non-Contributory) Pension.

S.I. 582 of 2006

OCCUPATIONAL PENSION SCHEMES (DISCLOSURE OF INFORMATION) (AMENDMENT) REGULATIONS, 2006

These Regulations provide for some technical amendments to the Occupational Pension Schemes (Disclosure of Information) Regulations 2006 (SI 301 of 2006).

S.I. No. 681 of 2006

SOCIAL WELFARE (CONSOLIDATED PAYMENTS PROVISIONS) (AMENDMENT)(No. 16) (EARLY CHILDCARE SUPPLEMENT) REGULATIONS 2006

These Regulations set out the dates on which Early Childcare Supplement will be payable for the 2007 and subsequent years.

S.I. No. 692 of 2006

SOCIAL WELFARE (CONSOLIDATED PAYMENTS PROVISIONS) (AMENDMENT) (No. 14) (INCREASE IN RATES) REGULATIONS 2006

The Social Welfare Act 2006 provides for increases in the maximum rates of social insurance payments arising from Budget 2007.

These Regulations provide for increases in the reduced rates of Illness Benefit, Jobseeker's Benefit, Health and Safety Benefit, State Pension (Contributory), State Pension (Transition), Widow's and Widower's (Contributory) Pension and Deserted Wife's Benefit, and also provides for increases in the rates of tapered increases in respect of Qualified Adults. All of these increases are effective from the first week in January 2007.

The Regulations also provide for increases in the minimum weekly rate of Maternity Benefit and Adoptive Benefit, with effect from January 2007.

The Social Welfare Act 2003 provided that, with effect from the 19th January 2004, any increase for a qualified child applicable to Jobseeker's Benefit, Illness Benefit, Injury Benefit and Health

and Safety Benefit will only be payable where the weekly income of the spouse or partner of the claimant does not exceed a prescribed amount. These Regulations provide for increasing that amount to €400 per week.

These Regulations also provide for the disregard of €200 per week in earnings from employment when calculating means for the purposes of the State Pension (Non-Contributory).

S.I. No. 693 of 2006
**SOCIAL WELFARE (RENT ALLOWANCE)
 (AMENDMENT) REGULATIONS 2006**

These Regulations provide for increases in the amount of means disregarded for people affected by the decontrol of rents and the minimum rent for the purposes of the Rent Allowance scheme with effect from January 2007.

S.I. No. 694 of 2006
**SOCIAL WELFARE (OCCUPATIONAL INJURIES)
 (AMENDMENT) REGULATIONS 2006**

The Social Welfare Act 2006 provides for increases in the maximum rates of benefits payable under the Occupational Injuries Benefits Scheme arising from the Budget. These Regulations provide for increases in the reduced rates of the following Occupational Injuries benefits:

- in respect of Disablement Gratuities appropriate to degrees of disablement assessed at 19% or less with effect from 1 January 2007,
- in respect of Disablement Pension payable in lieu of such Gratuities, with effect from 5 January 2007, and
- in respect of Injury Benefit payable to persons under the age of sixteen with effect from 1 January 2007.

S.I. No. 695 of 2006
**SOCIAL WELFARE (OCCUPATIONAL INJURIES)
 (AMENDMENT) (No. 1) (MISCELLANEOUS
 PROVISIONS) REGULATIONS 2006**

These Regulations amend the Regulations which govern the Occupational Injury Benefit Scheme, in advance of consolidation of Occupational Injury Benefit Regulations dating from 1967.

Article 3 contains a number of amendments to the Social Welfare (Claims and Payments) Regulations 1952 (S.I. 374 of 1952), including provision for:

- prescribing a 3 month time limit for making a claim to Death Benefit commencing on the date of death of the insured person, and a 6 week time limit in the case of Medical Care with effect from the commencement of such care,
- the nomination of another person to receive payment of benefit on behalf of a claimant or beneficiary subject to the consent of the Minister. This consent may be withdrawn by the Minister in circumstances deemed appropriate by him or her,
- a book of payable orders being furnished to the claimant on production of evidence as to the claimant's identity but such book of payable orders will continue to be the property of the Minister. This book must be returned at the request of an officer of the Minister to such person as maybe directed,
- any right to benefit being extinguished after 6 months if the payment is not encashed within this period. A Deciding Officer or an Appeals Officer may extend this period where they deem it appropriate to do so,
- the continuation of payment of certain benefits while the claimant is absent from the State,
- exception from disqualification where a person is detained in legal custody, and
- the circumstances in which payment of benefit is suspended during detention in legal custody.

Article 4 provides a number of amendments to the Social Welfare (Occupational Injuries) Regulations 1967 (S.I. No. 77 of 1967) including provision for :

- outlining the conditions under which a person is deemed to be incapable of work,
- disqualification of Injury Benefit or an increase of Disablement Benefit by way of Incapacity Supplement for a period not exceeding 9 weeks if the person fails to:

- (a) comply with instructions relating to their incapacity issued by a medical practitioner on attendance for medical or other examination without good cause,

(b) refrain from behaviour which is likely to hinder his or her recovery, or

(c) see an officer of the Minister and to answer any reasonable enquiries by an officer relating to his or her claim,

- the suspension of Injury Benefit, Disablement or an increase of Disablement by way of Incapacity Supplement in certain circumstances, and
- the circumstances whereby a person may undertake either employment of a rehabilitative nature or employment which is subject to certain weekly earnings limits.

Article 5 amends the Social Welfare (Claims and Payments) (Amendment) Regulations 1967 (S.I. No. 85 of 1967) to provide that an employer who fails to report the details of an occupational accident to an officer of the minister shall be guilty of an offence. It also removes the reference to an obsolete fine amount.

Article 6 provides for the abolition of article 3 in the Social Welfare (Occupational Injuries) (Medical Care) (Regulations) 1967 regarding a duplicate provision relating to late claims of Medical Care.

Article 7 provides for the imposition of time limited constraints when making a claim under the Occupational Injuries Benefit scheme in respect of certain prescribed diseases contracted from prescribed occupations or established under an “Individual Proof” basis.

S.I. No. 696 of 2006

SOCIAL WELFARE (CONSOLIDATED PAYMENTS PROVISIONS) (AMENDMENT) (No. 15) (ABSENCE FROM STATE AND IMPRISONMENT) REGULATIONS 2006

These Regulations provide for a number of amendments to the Social Welfare (Consolidated Claims and Payments Provisions) Regulations 1994 (as amended) in advance of further consolidation due shortly.

Article 2 inserts a new Chapter 2B into Part 7 of the consolidated regulations to include provision (currently contained in several regulations dating

from 1953 to 1993) for instances where payment under certain schemes may be made while the claimant or beneficiary is absent from the State or detained in legal custody.

S.I. No. 697 of 2006

SOCIAL WELFARE (CONSOLIDATED SUPPLEMENTARY WELFARE ALLOWANCE)(AMENDMENT) (No. 3) (RENT SUPPLEMENT MEANS DISREGARD) REGULATIONS 2006

These Regulations provide for amendments to the conditions for entitlement to Rent Supplement payable under the Supplementary Welfare Allowance scheme.

In assessing the means of a claimant for Rent Supplement, recipients of State Pension (Contributory), State Pension (Transition), Invalidity Pension, Widow’s (Contributory) Pension, Widower’s (Contributory) Pension, State Pension (Non-Contributory), Widow’s (Contributory) Pension, Widower’s (Non-Contributory) Pension aged 65 or over, will have the difference between their pension payment and the rate of Supplementary Welfare Allowance payable (appropriate to their family circumstances) disregarded.

APPENDIX 4(A) REGULATORY IMPACT ANALYSIS

1) The Department's Legislation Programme for 2006

The Department's Legislation Programme for 2006 encompassed the enactment of two pieces of primary legislation, i.e.:

- the Social Welfare Law Reform and Pensions Act 2006, and
- the Social Welfare Act 2006.

As these acts provided the statutory basis for the implementation of a number of budgetary initiatives, together with some technical amendments to the social welfare code but did not entail substantive adjustments to the existing statutory schemes, RIAs were not required.

2) Comhairle (Amendment) Bill 2004

Proposals (including the Heads of a Bill) were brought to Government in 2006 for the Citizens Information Bill, 2006 to replace the Comhairle (Amendment) Bill 2004.

A screening RIA was carried out on those aspects of the proposals which were new to the Government, i.e., which had not already been considered in the context of the decision to publish the Comhairle (Amendment) Bill 2004.

The RIA was published on the Department's website at the time of the publication of the Citizens Information Bill, 2006 (October, 2006). It is available on the website.

APPENDIX 5 PERFORMANCE AGAINST CUSTOMER CHARTER STANDARDS

Access to our Services

Making our offices accessible for all including people with disabilities

90% of our offices are now accessible for people with disabilities.

95% of Branch Offices are accessible for people with disabilities.

All new/refurbished offices facilitate access/movement by people with disabilities. Programme of improvements (managed by the Office of Public Works) to make existing offices accessible is ongoing.

Extending our opening hours in many of our Local Offices

At the end of 2006 a total of 41 local offices were providing a service throughout lunch hour. The situation at other offices will be kept under review.

Respecting your privacy needs if calling to our offices

This service is being provided where facilities permit, to those who require it.

Improving our services for visually impaired customers

All information on the Department's website has been developed to an XHTML, AAA standard.

This enables visually impaired users to use special screen reading software to have the text read out by their computers. The site has been optimised for custom settings, i.e. text can be resized on screen to suit the customer's needs.

A Braille printer was provided to Blind Pension section in order to communicate with our visually impaired clients.

Information is provided in Braille, on audio or in large print on request. A sign language facilitator is also made available on request.

Improving our telephone answering service by aiming towards a target of answering all telephone calls within 30 seconds

75% of offices confirm that all external telephone enquiries are answered within 30 seconds of initial ring.

Phoning you back if you ask us to

This service is provided by all scheme areas

Provision of Information

Providing you with full, clear and correct information on our schemes and services when required.

You can request claim forms and information leaflets by telephoning LoCall 1890 20 23 25 or you can download them from our website at www.welfare.ie.

The majority of leaflets requested from the LoCall leaflet request line are issued within 24 hours. All booklets and forms are available on the website.

Ensuring our forms and leaflets are simple and easy to understand

All forms and leaflets have been prepared with reference to 'Plain English' guidelines.

Providing help with filling in forms at your local Social Welfare Office or your local Citizens Information Centre (CIC). (contact LoCall 1890 777 121)

This service is provided as required on an ongoing basis.

Supporting employers in the operation of the PRSI contribution system

A pro-active approach is maintained with Special Collection Employers who deal with the Department. PRSI updates and changes are issued by annual mailshot. Since 2005 this mailshot has issued via e-mail resulting in material being received by the Employers in a more timely manner, thus improving turnaround times for returns.

Your Claim

Letting you know how soon you may expect a decision on your claim

Scheme areas notify customers if there will be a likely delay in processing a claim.

Advising you how to get financial or other help in the meantime, if necessary

This is standard practice across all scheme areas

Letting you know the different payment options available

This is standard procedure across all scheme areas

Informing you of the reasons for the decision on your claim

This is standard practice across all scheme areas

Informing you of your right to appeal that decision and how to make an appeal

This is standard practice across scheme areas where such a right exists

Letting you know that you also have access to the Ombudsman's Office

This is normal practice where occasion demands.

Comments and Complaints

Promoting and developing our existing Comment and Complaint System

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

Answering any complaint within 15 working days

This standard is being met across all scheme areas

Guaranteeing that your complaint will not affect how we treat you in the future

To ensure impartiality, complaints are dealt with by designated complaints officers.

e-Government Services

Using modern technology to significantly improve the service we give

The Service Delivery Modernisation (SDM) programme is currently being implemented within the Department. The main objective of the SDM programme is to modernise the delivery of services to our customers by developing a new generation of IS systems and the development of improved business processes and procedures to take advantage of flexibilities afforded by the new system.

SDM Phase 2 is currently underway. The Pension Schemes (State Pension (Transition) (SPT) and State Pension (Contributory) (SPC)), Bereavement Grant (BG), Free Travel and Overpayment and Debt Management have been transferred to the new computer system. SDM Phase 2 also involves transferring Child Benefit and Household Benefits onto the new integrated platform in 2007.

The modernisation of the General Register Office (GRO) has led to improved services in the Child Benefit and General Benefits areas. There is increased use of email services for contact with customers and for distributing information to employers.

Providing an improved range of services through our website

All suitable primary booklets and application forms are available for download from our website. A strategic review of our website was carried out during 2006 and work is being carried out on the website as a result of this.

Continuing to support Reach (an agency set up by the Government to develop electronic ways of linking people and the public service)

This is ongoing.

Treating You Fairly

Serving all our customers in an equal, fair and courteous manner

Customer service training is provided to staff to ensure this standard is maintained.

Applying the law consistently and fairly in relation to your entitlements and obligations

This is standard practice across all scheme areas.

Security and Confidentiality

Keeping your personal information safe

This is treated as a priority standard across all areas of the Department

Using that information only for social welfare purposes and as permitted by law

This is treated as a priority standard across all areas of the Department

APPENDIX 6: PUBLIC PROCUREMENT AND CAPITAL APPRAISAL

a) Reach

The Reach project arose out of proposals by the Department for a cross-departmental unit to pursue a number of aspects of integrated delivery of Government services. The proposals originally approved in 1999 included:

- establishment of the PPSN as a common identifier,
- preparation of proposals for public service cards,
- establishment of a common means database,
- customer identity validation,
- integration of PPSN allocation and birth registration.

In 2000 the Government decided that the Public Service Broker would be the framework within which integrated electronic services should be delivered.

Reach has developed since then through a number of separate projects. The underlying approach has also been modified in line with changing technology and related developments.

The individual projects included:

- development and deployment of the Public Service Broker,
- development of an inter-agency messaging service (IAMS),
- a death event publication system for use by public service agencies,
- public service identity service provided through the Department,
- support for Revenue PAYE online service.

Currently Reach is supporting the introduction of the PAYE online service which is expected to be fully operational later this year.

While none of the individual projects involved costs over €30million, expenditure on Reach-related projects in total, which includes operational and support costs for the live environment, has been in the region of €50 million.

The successful completion of the current phase will mean that the infrastructure is in place to support online delivery of a range of public services. Discussions have been initiated with various departments and agencies to identify the possibilities for early access to other services via the Broker. The intention will be to develop a programme of future work in this area and an assessment of the costs involved so that the necessary decisions can be taken as to the future development of the project.

b) Service Delivery Modernisation Programme

In July 2000, Government approval was obtained to proceed with the Service Delivery Modernisation (SDM) Programme, which aims to deliver a high quality, proactive service to customers. The main drivers for modernisation were identified as:

- Out-dated technologies and work processes
- Inadequate response to clients needs
- Growing caseloads
- Government demands for improved service and cost reductions

SDM is a multi-year programme of change using modern technologies and business models to achieve a radical transformation of service to customers. A new generation of ICT systems to replace legacy computer systems is being developed which will facilitate a more customer centric service and support DSFA e-Government strategy. Organisational structures and work processes are being redesigned in order to take advantage of the flexibilities on offer from the new ICT systems.

These developments will allow DSFA 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.

The SDM programme is being implemented in a number of self-contained projects, spanning over several years. Each project has two strands

– one focused on developing the ICT system components and the other on implementing a parallel programme of Organisational Change.

Phase 1 of the SDM programme, which focused on the Child Benefit scheme, was successfully implemented in November 2002. The development of the new IT system and improved work practices allows the Child Benefit area to respond more rapidly to customer claims and to deliver a more personalised and efficient service.

Phase 2 of SDM commenced on 31 May 2004 and covers the extension of the programme to Retirement and Old Age Contributory Pension (now renamed State Pension (Transition) (SPT) and State Pension (Contributory) respectively (SPC)), Household Benefits, Free Travel, Early Childcare Supplement and Bereavement Grant. This Phase also incorporated the implementation of a new Overpayments and Debt Management system.

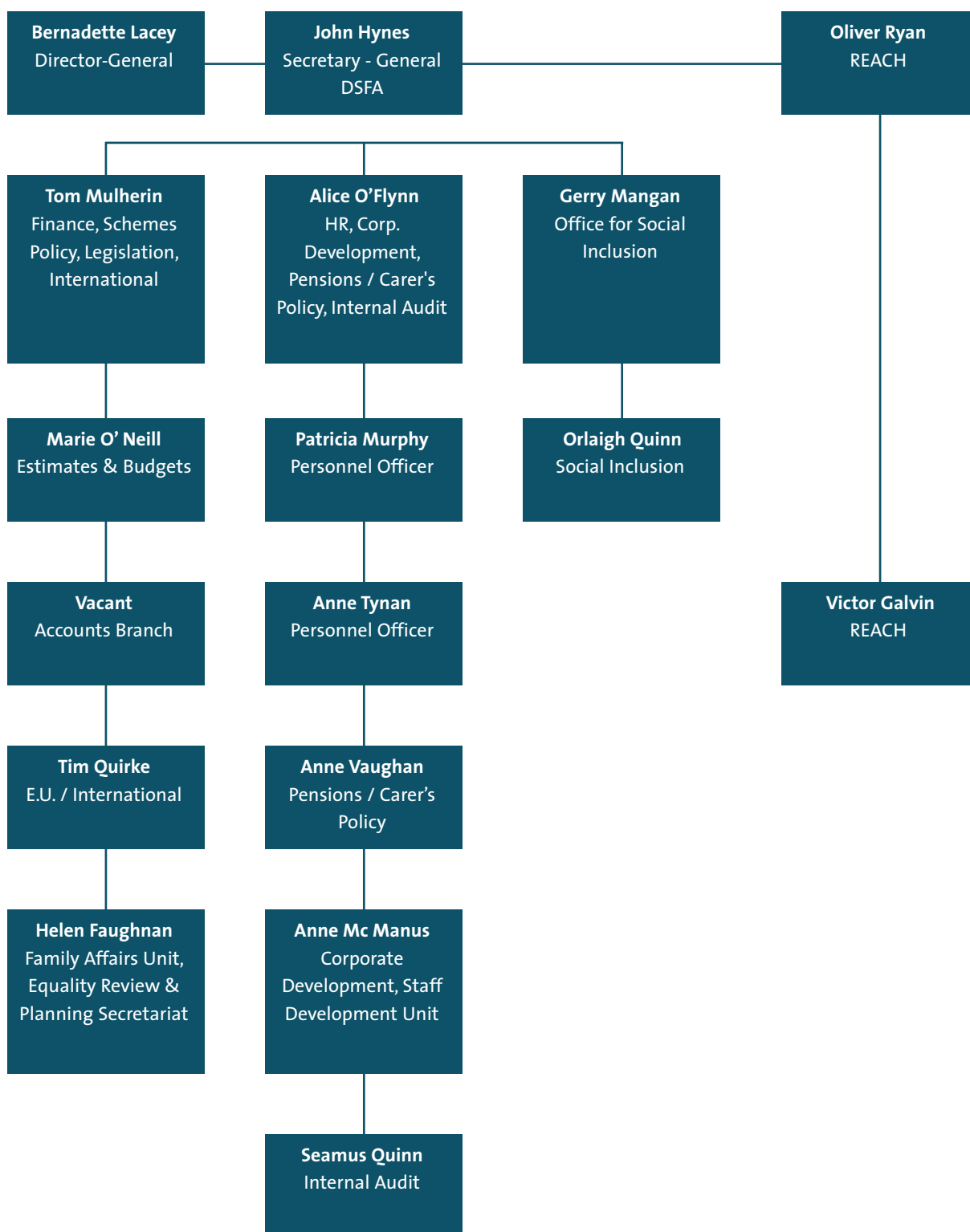
While none of the individual projects involved costs over €30 million, expenditure on all SDM related projects in the period since commencement (2001 to end 2006) amounts to €33 million.

Appendix 7: Scheme Name Changes In 2006

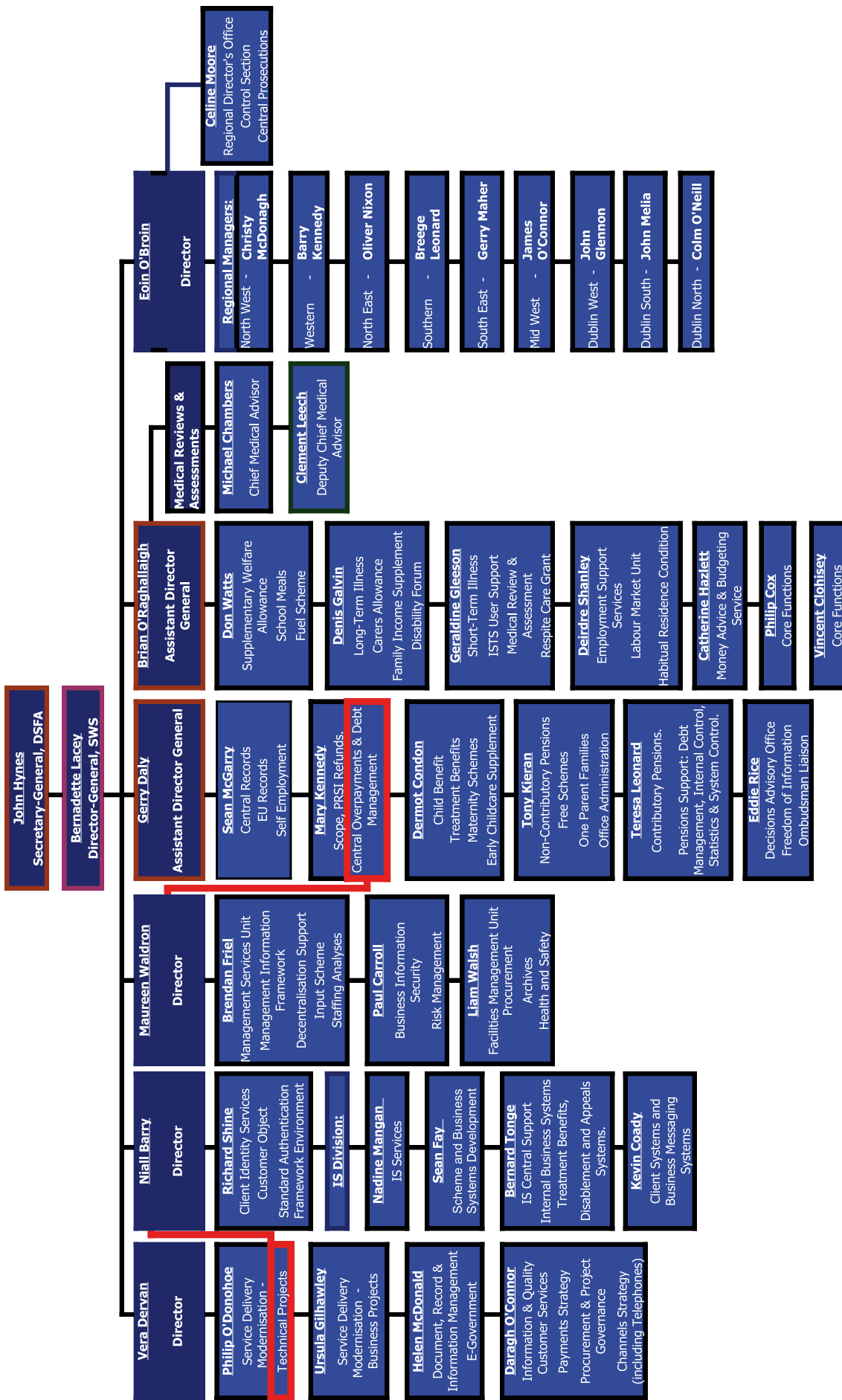
As provided for in Section 4 of the Social Welfare Law Reform and Pensions Act 2006 a number of scheme names changed during the year, as follows;

Former Name	New Name	Effective Date
Orphans (Contributory) Allowance	Guardian's Payment (Contributory)	28 July, 2006
Orphans (Non-Contributory) Pension	Guardian's Payment (Non – Contributory)	28 July, 2006
Retirement Pension	State Pension (Transition)	28 September, 2006
Old Age (Contributory) Pension	State Pension (Contributory)	29 September, 2006
Old Age (Non-Contributory) Pension	State Pension (Non- Contributory)	29 September, 2006
Disability Benefit	Illness Benefit	2 October, 2006
Unemployability Supplement	Incapacity Supplement	2 October, 2006
Unemployment Assistance	Jobseeker's Allowance	4 October, 2006
Unemployment Benefit	Jobseeker's Benefit	5 October, 2006

Appendix 8: Organisation Structure – Aireacht



ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE - SOCIAL WELFARE SERVICES



APPENDIX 9 Websites of the Department and its Agencies

Department of Social and Family Affairs	www.welfare.ie
Social Welfare Appeals Office	www.socialwelfareappeals.ie
Citizens Information	www.citizensinformation.ie
Combat Poverty Agency	www.cpa.ie
The Family Support Agency	www.fsa.ie
Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS)	www.mabs.ie
The Office for Social Inclusion (OSI)	www.socialinclusion.ie
Pensions Board	www.pensionsboard.ie
The Pensions Ombudsman	www.pensionsombudsman.ie
Reach Services	www.reachservices.ie

Appendix 10: Ministers In Charge Of The Department Since 1947

	From	To
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	

www.welfare.ie