



Sinn Féin Pre-Budget 2003 Submission

**A Budget for an Ireland of Equals
Issued November 2002**

I. Introduction

Since shortly after the General Election when the true state of the public finances became known the Irish people are being prepared for a Budget of cutbacks for 2003. This was confirmed by the Book of Estimates published on 14 November which saw major reductions in planned expenditure across all sectors of Government activity. In the six months April to November 2002 a Government which had promised no shortfall, no cutbacks and increased spending, has become a Government with a budget deficit, cutbacks across the board, and reduced spending.

In successive pre-Budget submissions since 1997 Sinn Féin has argued consistently for a different course. We have called for Budgets which harnessed economic prosperity to foster equality and the redistribution of wealth. Instead, the series of Budgets from the Fianna Fáil/Progressive Democrats Government has widened the gap between rich and poor in our society. Yes, spending on almost all Government activity was increased, significantly in many cases, but this did not go hand in hand with long-term planning and real reform of the structural inequalities and inefficiencies inherited from the days of economic recession.

As a result, after five years of unprecedented prosperity we still have:

- A quarter of our children and a fifth of our adults in households with less than half the average income and the most unequal distribution of wealth of any industrialised state outside the USA;
- A simmering crisis in our unreformed, two-tier health services in spite of major increases in spending;
- 50,000 households on local authority housing waiting lists;
- An education system which denies equality of access at all levels to children of lower income families;
- Inadequate infrastructure in transport and communications which is a major drain on the overall economy and reflects lack of proper long-term planning;
- Unbalanced regional development which puts a huge strain on the infrastructure of overdeveloped regions and leaves the disadvantaged regions lagging behind.

This is the context in which we approach

Budget 2003. The difficulties we now face do not simply come about because of the shortfall in the public finances which have arisen in 2002 – they result from mismanagement and squandering of the unique opportunities of the past five years.

A society riven by inequality now faces the economic downturn. The wealthy have been well cushioned by this government. Those on lower incomes have seen neither the substantial direct gain in income nor, of equal importance, the improved services which they need and which they were promised.

Sinn Féin makes no apology for presenting again in our Pre-Budget submission many of the demands we raised in the years of record budget surpluses. These are issues of social justice. They cannot be set aside because we now face the results of government mismanagement. They must remain on the political and economic agenda.

Some may characterise our approach as simply ‘tax and spend’. Yes, we do seek new ways to ensure that the wealthiest individuals and companies pay their fair share. But we also call for fundamental structural reforms which would make for more efficient delivery of public services and thus be far more economic than the ill-planned and ramshackle structures we have at present.

Sinn Féin believes the priorities in Budget 2003 must be:

- Concentration of resources on much needed improvements in health, housing, social welfare, education, childcare and public services which enhance the quality of life of all citizens;
- Reform of these services to ensure equality of access, efficient delivery and value for money;
- Fundamental review and reform of the tax system with tax reductions for the low paid only; higher taxes for the very

highest earners and profit-makers.

Equality-proof the Budget

Discrimination and social and economic marginalisation go hand in hand. As a matter of priority, we want a budget that moves us closer to an Ireland of Equals.

Sinn Féin calls for the Government to:

- Equality-proof this budget (including poverty-proofing) – in a transparent process. We want to see a “report card” on this budget;
- Equality/poverty proof ANY budget cuts;
- Recognise inclusivity and equalisation as significant “value for money”;
- Back promised equality measures with adequate financial commitments;
- Put its money where its mouth is on equality and – at minimum – fund full implementation of the recommendations of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy; the National Plan for Women; the Taskforce on the Travelling Community (1995) and Traveller Health Strategy; the National Plan Against Racism; and the report of the Commission for the Status of People with Disabilities;
- Increase transparency by creating a line-itemised “Equalisation Measures” section of the budget, reflecting spending across all departments to redress regional inequality, economic inequality, social inequality, and global inequality (ODA); and a similar line-itemised “Equality Measures” section reflecting spending per department;

Since this Government has repeatedly professed its commitment to equality, these measures should pose no difficulty and,

indeed, provide them the opportunity of public proof and accountability.

2. All-Ireland Economic Development

The Good Friday Agreement is an all-Ireland Agreement.

Through the new political institutions created under the Good Friday Agreement there has been growing all-Ireland co-operation in the crucial fields of economic development, education, health, environment, agriculture, transport and tourism. In each of these areas we have already seen progress and programmes of work are being advanced through the implementation bodies.

The potential is obvious and it is clear that an all-Ireland economy would bring about considerable benefits to all living on the island.

It is essential that such co-operation continues.

Sinn Féin believes that the Irish Government should:

- Seek to expand the all-Ireland areas of co-operation;
- Develop the potential provided by the implementation bodies;
- Make available the appropriate financial and other resources to ensure that substantial progress can take place.

3. Taxation Justice

Overview

What is a budget for?

Sinn Féin believes that we need a fair and just tax regime as a means to redistribute

resources and invest in those parts of society suffering economic marginalisation and social exclusion.

We want to use tax revenue to invest in health, education, pensions, and child welfare, and to invest also in economic development and aid business to grow sustainably and make a positive contribution to society.

A priority is building infrastructure that benefits all and is grounded in the guarantee of universal provision whether it is energy, roads, public transport, telecommunications, social, health or educational resources and facilities.

The failure of short-termism

Uncovering the true state of government finances is a journey taken with a lot of unease. A government that had a €2.26 billion surplus one year and let it deteriorate to a possible €2 billion deficit next year has taken a reckless attitude to our finances.

It shows a government without a real long-term strategy for the vital investments we need.

Time to tackle tax inequality

The collapse in tax revenue is a crisis of immense proportions and does not arise solely out of the current economic recession. It is also based in the years of tinkering with an inefficient and inequitable tax regime, where tax relief was piled upon tax relief with no evaluation as to their real economic value, where the contributions of business and the wealthy decreased while the average worker and consumer ended up making an ever greater contribution to total tax revenue.

The tax cuts of the last five years implemented by Fianna Fáil and the Progressive Democrats were applied in an inequitable manner. 25% of the value of the cuts went to the top 10% of earners.

The recent Household Budget Survey showed the net effect of this inequality. In 1995 the top 10% of earners had a disposable income that

was on average 11 times greater than the incomes of the lowest earners. By 2000 this gap had widened with the wealthiest 10% earning 13 times more than the lowest earners.

We need to rebuild our tax regime based on the principles of equity and transparency.

Three reviews

(1) A comprehensive tax review

When it comes to formulating tax policy there has been one question that successive governments have been afraid to ask. Who is paying tax and more importantly who isn't?

There must be a comprehensive review of the tax regime. To do this properly would involve all the social partners, must be time limited and must seek to formulate proposals for a truly equitable tax system.

(2) Room at the top? Analyse and publicise the revenue data

Request the Revenue Commissioners to redo a survey last undertaken in 1997 of what percentage income tax the richest earners in the 26 Counties are paying. The 1997 survey found that some of the top earners were paying little or no tax through the use of avoidance measures. One in five was paying tax at an effective rate of less than 5%.

The 26 Counties has one of the lowest taxation takes in the industrialised world, and 82.6% of income tax is being paid by the PAYE sector.

(3) A cost benefit analysis of tax reliefs and shelters

We need a cost benefit analysis of the battery of tax reliefs that have been set up by minister after minister. What benefits are we as a society getting from these tax reliefs and what are the costs?

Income Tax

(1) Super tax

Even though we are proposing three reviews of how the tax system is actually working we

still need to take some positive short-term decisions now.

Figures released last January showed that 62% of workers earn less than €25,396 annually. But there is a super wealthy group of more than 28,000 households who in 2001 earned more than €126,984 (£100,000) per year.

Sinn Féin proposes that the Department of Finance and the Revenue Commissioners investigate the formulation of a super tax on these super rich earners. This should happen in tandem with the elimination of tax avoidance measures which they enjoy and which are out of reach of the average worker. A new 50% super tax band for individual incomes more than €100,000 is an appropriate measure while we wait for the Department of Finance to come clean on how little tax the wealthy in Irish society are paying.

(2) Take the low paid out of the tax net

At the other end of the scale we need to take the low paid completely out of the tax net and not just those on the minimum wage. Increasing tax credits is the fairest way of doing this. Everyone gets the same cash benefit rather than the coalition tax cuts, which over the past five years, saw only 5% of budget provisions go to the bottom 20% of earners.

If there is more scope for income tax cuts the focus should be on widening the 20% tax band and taking more average earners off the 40% rate.

(3) Tax Exiles

This is a complicated issue and needs to be addressed vigorously. Sinn Féin believes that all income generated in the state should be liable to general taxation irrespective of the residency of the individuals concerned.

Business Taxes

(1) Tax relief for Research & Development and investment in workers

R&D investment in the 26 Counties is 40% of the EU average and must be increased. It is a

vital element of any future job creation strategy. Here too there is a role for the social partners in formulating proposals for generating incentives not just for increased R&D but also for investing in the education and training of workers. Tax credits for real R&D makes sense.

(2) Capital Gains Tax

We call for an increase in Capital Gains Tax to 40%, back to the level it was before Minister McCreevy took office. The cut to 20% impacted hugely in favour of the wealthy. Why is it that the average worker has to pay tax at 40% on the high end of their income, while their wealthier bosses do not?

(3) PRSI

We want to return employers PRSI to 12%. Employers payroll taxes are already the lowest in the EU and would still be competitive internationally at a 12% PRSI rate.

(4) Corporation Tax

There should be no more cuts in corporation tax. The rate should be maintained at 16%, given that the ESRI has stated that a rate of 17.5% could be sustained without damage to competitiveness. Businesses will have to invest in R&D, education and training, and in the community and voluntary sector to get tax relief.

Vested Interests

(1) Mortgage relief for speculative investors

Rescind the decision taken in the last budget to restore mortgage relief on second homes and curtail existing property reliefs.

(2) Bringing the banks into line

The banking sector might have got away with paying off their outstanding DIRT taxes years late but they have also been a beneficiary of EU economic and monetary integration. Sinn Féin calls for a substantially increased rate of corporation tax for the banking sector.

With profits way above the EU average they could well afford a special rate of Corporation

Tax at 30%. We need more inventive ways of using the massive financial resources of the Irish banking sector in a positive way.

One proposal is to get them to divert some of their profits in social and infrastructural investments such as ICT networks, small business development and social economy projects such as addressing the lack of effective childcare provision.

(3) Equality

It has been clear that catering to the needs of the wealthy and protecting their economic interests has been at the centre of the last decade of budgets. Now we need to ensure real poverty proofing of budgetary policy and finding the money to fund realistic increases in welfare provision like reaching the 2007 NAPS target by 2004.

(4) SSIA

The Government made an extraordinary miscalculation in the projected cost of the Special Savings and Investment Scheme (SSIA). The Scheme itself was flawed to begin with, in that the saver of the largest amount benefited proportionately much more than the saver of the smallest amount. A much more equitable scheme could and should have been devised. But over 1 million people have availed of the Scheme and entered a contract with the Government in good faith. That contract cannot now be breached.

The Scheme has to be retained but, in order to reduce the long-term cost somewhat, the Government should:

- Allow people to leave the SSIA early and without penalty, within a defined period;
- Seal the existing levels that people have bought into the scheme.

4. Towards Free Health Care for All

Sinn Féin supports a right of access to adequate and appropriate health care services for all, regardless of ability to pay. Primary care is particularly important because of its role in achieving health gain in a cost-efficient way through prevention, health promotion and early intervention. Currently, and until the creation of a National Health Service with free healthcare for all, the medical card remains the instrument which gives low-income families access to the health service.

In Budget 2003 Sinn Féin urges eight major steps:

- The extension of medical card eligibility to all those on or below the minimum wage and to all those under the age of 18, people still in full time education and those over the age of 65;
- Review and expansion of the number of diseases included in the Long Term Illness Scheme, with asthma being a priority for inclusion;
- Increase the levels of PRSI contributions. Money raised from this increase should then be ring-fenced for spending in the health sector, in addition to the sum committed for 2002 linked to a medical/health inflation index;
- Increase in health spending designed to eliminate waiting lists and inequality in the health service;
- Increased investment in health promotion and primary care;
- Review of the National Treatment Purchase Fund. In the current year the Government is spending €30 million to buy treatment in the private sector for patients on public waiting lists. At the

same time taxpayers are spending €165 million annually to subsidise the stays of private patients in public hospitals. An immediate value for money assessment of the NTPF needs to be carried out. The NTPF would not be necessary if the government implemented real reforms in the health system;

- Increased All Ireland Co-Operation on Health: The skills of service providers in the health systems, North and South, can be better utilised, and hospitals and other resources more efficiently employed if we have enhanced all-Ireland co-operation in the short-term leading to a single all-Ireland health service. We also need to commission a Cost Duplication Audit of current and projected health care delivery North and South;
- Health infrastructure equalisation, including guarantees to maintain and develop acute hospital services at all existing hospital sites.

Cancer Screening

- Adequate funding to be made available for the immediate commencement of Phase 2 of the BreastCheck Programme i.e. the expansion of the programme to eligible women nationwide;
- Implementation, on a pilot basis, of a national prostate screening programme similar to the BreastCheck programme.

Escalating costs of medicine

Drug costs for the General Medical Services Scheme are set to exceed 2002 estimates by 30 per cent. The percentage of generic items prescribed under the GMS in 2001 was 20.9%. This is an increase of only 3.5% since 1993 and is significantly lower than in the UK and other European countries. There has been

little active encouragement of generic prescribing in this country despite the fact that all generic products now available must be of a quality equal to that of the original.

In Budget 2003 Sinn Féin urges:

- Instigate a policy of generic drug prescribing to address the low rate of generic prescribing in this country. As generic drugs cost approximately 30% less than proprietary drugs there is potential for a significant saving in costs if GMS prescriptions were written generically. This should be accompanied by a government information campaign aimed at health professionals. There is evidence from other countries that information campaigns directed at GP's can increase the percentage of generics dispensed;
- Renegotiation of section 5.3 of the agreement between the Irish Pharmaceutical Healthcare Association and the Department of Health on supply terms, conditions and prices of medicines supplied to the health boards. The level of rebate should be returned to the pre August 1998 level of 4%. It was reduced to 3% in August 1998. This would have given a saving of approximately €6 million on the expenditure on Medicine in 2001;
- Immediate introduction of electronic patient records and/or unique person identifier numbers. This would reduce inaccuracies in the Health Board/GMS databases which according to the Auditor General's Report for 2001 led to over payment of capitation payments to doctors and pharmacies to the value of approximately €12 million.

Two –Tier Health Care

Health care in this state is still a two-tier system and the private sector is subsidised by

taxpayers. In 2001, the estimated net cost to the state of an in-patient bed in a major teaching hospital which is designated for the private sector is €319 per day and the estimated cost to other acute hospitals was €219 per day. The private sector is allocated 20 per cent of the beds in public hospitals but only contributes 11 per cent of the cost of running these hospitals. The two-tier system gives consultants an incentive to occupy as many hospital beds as possible with private patients. Taxpayers are spending €165 million annually to subsidise the hospital stays of private patients.

Consultants are being paid from the public purse for treating public patients while at the same time they profit from the thriving private health business. They are allowed to work unlimited private hours in public hospitals, using medical resources and public offices funded by the taxpayer for their business for personal private profit.

In Budget 2003 Sinn Féin urges:

- Renegotiation of the 'Common Contract for Consultant Medical Staff'. Abatement for private practice by consultants should be directly related to the relative numbers of private patients treated by each individual consultant. Inclusion of the stipulation (dropped in 1991) that admissions to public hospitals should be based on medical need;
- Removal of tax incentives for private medical care. Again the savings from this initiative should be ring-fenced for additional spending in the health sector;
- Review of breakdown of public-private beds under the bed designation arrangements: reduce the designation of private beds to 10% of the overall bed capacity;
- Funding to be made available for additional consultants to work solely in

the public sector for the first years of their contracts;

- A special location allowance for nurses and junior doctors working in the greater Dublin area;
- Ending the existing system of long working hours for junior doctors and to see the recommendations of the Commission on Nursing implemented.

5. Making Children and Childcare a Real Priority

What value economic development if the children of the nation are not properly cared for? We must ensure that children receive the best care at all times. That includes care by parents in the home, care by other family members, paid care by childcare workers in the home, early childhood education, crèches and other facilities provided by the community or voluntary sector or by private concerns. Childcare remains unaffordable for many families. These proposals are the minimum necessary to offset the rising cost of living, especially for those eligible for the Child Dependent Allowances.

In addition to the resources earmarked in the National Development Plan, a further commitment is needed which will really show the determination of the Government to prioritise this issue.

Therefore Sinn Féin proposes that:

- We need a Childcare Strategy which values equally all children and parents, ensures the provision of quality regulated childcare services and prioritises the needs of children and families experiencing disadvantage and social exclusion. We need to establish a State-assisted and State-wide Childcare Service, in urban and rural

areas, in tandem with existing service-providers;

- Equalise the Child Dependent Allowance to a weekly figure of €25 for all children on the Child Dependent Allowance;
- Increase Child Benefit by €31.80 and €38.10 for the higher rate as the final instalment of the Government's three-year programme to increase child benefit;
- €15 million for high quality school meals for low-income children;
- Increase investment in play and recreational facilities with particular emphasis on disadvantaged areas. Play is the most important thing a young child can do – it is the way children learn about their bodies, their environment, ideas, events and the people and objects around them;
- Expansion of the Early Start Pre-School Project with a view towards the establishment of a state run pre-school system where access to free pre-school education is guaranteed from the age of 3. There are major benefits for children, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, if their access to early childhood education is increased.

6. Equal Access to Education

Perhaps more than anything else, education can fundamentally and positively transform society. At its best, it is child and student centred and cherishes all the children of our nation equally.

But the 26 Counties education system mirrors the social exclusion and division that has been exacerbated by the last government's deliberate policy of widening the gap between

rich and poor. Participation, and success in education is still greatly determined by class.

The recent OECD report 'Education at a Glance' shows that while Irish students compete very well with students from around the world this has far more to do with support provided by dedicated teaching professionals and parents than with government investment.

The report is a damning indictment of the failure of this government to invest properly in education. We are in the bottom seven nations in terms of money spent per primary school student and the bottom nine at second level.

The report also made clear the unacceptable pupil – teacher ratio that exists in this state. Sustained investment is necessary right through the Irish education system. While attention often focuses on the problems of access to Third level education, these problems are often the result of inadequate support at preschool, primary and secondary level.

The Government must accept that the primary tool for the ending of inequality in society is a fair and accessible education system. Already we have seen this government cut €36 million from education, including initiatives targeted at the most vulnerable in our society. As a matter of priority those cuts must be reversed and investment in education increased.

Primary and pre-school

- Increase in capitation grants to at least €200 per pupil, per year for national schools;
- Immediate implementation of the recommendations of the Benchmarking process without preconditions;
- Extend the Early Start programme to all schools in the RAPID and CLAR areas over the lifetime of this government;
- Raise the rate of the Back to School

Footwear and Clothing Allowance to €120;

- Prioritise investment in primary and pre-school education. The formative education years are the most important and the source of a great deal of the inequality and problems further down the line;
- Fast-track approval and commencement of new build and repair works at all schools highlighted by INTO.

Second level

- Immediate implementation of the recommendations of the Benchmarking process without preconditions;
- Abolish the mandatory payment of exam fees to secondary school students;
- Raise the rate of the Back to School Footwear and Clothing Allowance to €180;
- Full implementation of the Report of the Task Force on the Physical Sciences, including €178 million of capital investment to tackle the low levels of take-up of the physical sciences in second level;
- The creation of over a thousand new teaching positions to bring the pupil-teacher ratio down to 15:1 in line with the recommendations of 'The Allocation of Teachers to Second Level Schools' report. It is unacceptable that we have a higher pupil – teacher ratio than we did 30 years ago;
- Reverse the cutbacks in education announced this Autumn which included €2 million from capital investment in second level education, €6 million from proposed plans to cut the school drop-out rate and €5 million from programmes aimed at helping students

from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds get to Third level. Areas of disadvantage should be priorities for investment, not cutbacks.

Third Level

The abolition of university fees has done little to help the children of the least well-off enter Third level. While the inequality in access to education begins at primary level and even younger, the government has failed to invest in efforts to increase the number of working class young people attending university.

- Increase the grants to social welfare levels. While costing approximate €100 million, this would not only make it easier for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to get to university but it would also go some way to tackling the drop-out rates in university and the cost of that;
- A fairer system of grant allocation. The graduated income limit categories need to be improved to be made more gradual.

7. Housing is a Right

The Celtic Tiger boom has come and gone but the housing crisis is still here and worse than ever. In every decade of the last century there has been an unmet housing need which successive administrations have failed to resolve.

Despite three expert reports from Bacon, a new Planning Act and a Commission on the Private Rented Sector there are still huge problems in the housing sector. These include rising house prices, rising rents, evictions, homelessness and a record 54,000 households waiting for social or public sector housing.

Demographic, social and economic factors are bringing at least another 8,200 households onto the waiting list each year. Current government strategy if actually implemented will mean at least

14 years waiting before the lists are cleared under the best possible circumstances. This does not take into account increasing immigration flows or the cutbacks in spending built into this year's budget estimates that will cut local authority and social housing programmes by 5% in 2003.

In fact in some scenarios it is estimated that it could take 40 years to clear housing waiting lists.

Dublin Government policy has over the last six years been erratic and at times contradictory. As already highlighted targets for reducing housing waiting lists will not be met because of spending cutbacks.

It is unclear whether the provisions in the Planning Act 2000 that require that 20% of land approved for housing be set aside for social projects are actually being met. The cutting and then reintroduction last year of mortgage relief for second homes has sent hugely contradictory messages to the housing market.

House prices have in the 12 months to the end of September increased by 17% as investors returned to the market driving up prices and pushing already expensive homes out of the reach of first time buyers. The proposal to withdraw the first time buyers' grant while leaving the second home mortgage relief intact is fundamentally unjust.

Commitments given by the government prior to the election to set specific social and homelessness targets have not been delivered.

Sinn Féin believes that proper accommodation is a basic right and we support enshrining the right to housing in the constitution. There needs to be an evaluation of how the state disburses tax incentives and other supports in the housing market. We believe the present system is riven with inequality.

Sinn Féin's housing recommendations:

- No cuts in the provisions for local authority and social housing programmes. Funding should be increased at least in line with building inflation;
- Reinstate the first-time buyers grant;

- Immediate ending of tax relief for speculative buyers of second homes;
- A code of practice to ensure there is no excessive profiteering by private developers of infrastructure by local and central government;
- Capital Gains Tax (CGT) should be restored to its 1997 level of 40%. There should be a further increase in CGT on speculative owners of multiple dwellings;
- Review the Seaside Resort Tax Incentive Scheme;
- Set targets for the elimination of waiting lists with an immediate target of supplying suitable accommodation within two years for 70% of applicants;
- A state run financial institution or partnership between the Government and the more progressive financial institutions to provide an effective means for lower income households to purchase their own homes;
- Support the control of land prices with a statutory ceiling on the price of land zoned for housing to stop speculation and reduce soaring land prices;
- Statutory control of rents in the private rented sector, strengthened laws to set standards for accommodation and more resources to implement those regulations.

8. Investing in Irish Enterprise

A level playing pitch

Sinn Féin believes that the same quantity and quality of resources made available to foreign investors should be made available to indigenous enterprises. We need an economic development strategy that creates a balance between inward and indigenous investment. We need to encourage both small and large-scale indigenous companies with a research and development anchor, while also recognising that the bulk of employment stems from small and medium-sized enterprises.

Rewarding Research and Development

We need to support and reward indigenous industry when it engages in research and development strategies leading to long-term sustainable employment.

Our taxation proposals point towards the need for targeted and carefully monitored tax incentives. A creative corporate tax regime has an important part to play in funding research and development by Irish businesses.

No cuts in job creation grants

Sinn Féin opposes the cuts proposed in the budget estimates which will impact severely on the job creation activity of Enterprise Ireland, Shannon Development and the County Enterprise Boards.

At a time when we need to invest in indigenous industry and employment the funds for Enterprise Ireland, Shannon Development and County Enterprise Boards are to be cut by 18%, 30% and 13% respectively. Spending on some elements of FÁS are to be cut by 41%.

What message is the government and in particular the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment sending to Irish business? Now is the time for innovative investment in developing Irish business not cutbacks.

The IDA grants to industry are increasing, yet the cost of a new job in an IDA backed company was €13,375 in 2001. The cost of an Enterprise Ireland job was €8,977 - over €4,000 cheaper but still more costly than the €4,500 it took a County Enterprise Board to create a job.

Review and evaluate spending on job creation

Sinn Féin proposes a review of how funds are allocated by the Enterprise Trade and Employment Department. One example of the lack of accountability on spending is the failure to evaluate the actual costs of the 19 task forces created since 1997 by Mary Harney as minister. The government does not know how much the 19 task forces have cost and have not undertaken any cost benefit evaluation but still believe that “they provided an effective co-ordinated response to major company closures”.

Over €161 million was spent last year on job creation grants to industry. This is only part of a substantial economic development budget. We need to know that this money is being spent fairly and efficiently.

9. Transport

Public transport should no longer be treated as an add-on to government transport policy. Support for public transport is dependent on adequate levels of support from Government. Only then will motorists abandon their cars and take to bus and rail in significant enough numbers to reduce road accident deaths and damage to the environment by pollution. Commuting times would also be reduced with a follow-on benefit to business and the economy generally.

We are opposed to any attempt to privatise public transport or our road network, either openly, or by stealth through the use of Public Private Partnership (PPP). Efforts should be made to explore other methods of funding which ensure that the construction and maintenance of our infrastructure remains in public hands.

- Public transport must be funded to at least the level of counterparts in Europe. Without proper funding, an efficient public transport system will not emerge. Privatisation or liberalisation of CIE is not required, rather sustained and credible financial support for public transport must be a priority;
- We are opposed to the use of PPP in roadbuilding. While we see planned development and proper maintenance of our road network as essential, especially outside of Dublin, if necessary the money should be borrowed rather than using the discredited PPP system;
- We are opposed to the imposition of tolls on Irish roads. Where tolling is

necessary, shadow tolling should be used. Tolling can force vehicles, especially heavy goods vehicles to use secondary roads rather than pay a toll;

- Implementation of the Motor Insurance Advisory Board's recommendations;
- A Vehicle Registration Tax (VRT) equalisation system should be put in place to ensure that the owners of used cars which are exported abroad receive a proportionate refund of VRT paid;
- Aer Lingus must not be sold but retained as a vital part of the state's transport infrastructure.

10. Social Welfare

The budgets of the last five years have seen an economic policy directed not at tackling poverty in Irish society, but at benefiting the better off and wealthier elements of Irish society. From tax cuts in the top rates, to cuts in Corporation Tax and Capital Gains Tax, over the last five budgets the richest 10% of the population received 25% of the benefits and the poorest 20%, a mere 5%

While Sinn Féin acknowledges the economy is not as strong as it was even 12 months ago, this state is still a comparatively wealthy one. It is a state that must make the choice now to redistribute the wealth of this state, to look after those who have been abandoned by the rising economic tide, which lifted far less boats than the government admits. The gap between rich and poor has widened. Relative poverty is on the increase. We are now one of the most unequal states in the First World.

The government will claim there is not enough money to do all that we propose. The truth is the money is there, the financing is there, the question is does this government have the political will to deliver? Does it have the will to put the needs of the most vulnerable, the

needs of the poor, the hungry and the desperate before the desires of the better off in Irish society?

General Proposals

- End VAT on charities, costing an approximate €35 million, and allowing charities to put the money where it is most needed;
- As promised in the Government's Health Strategy, widen eligibility for the medical card. All those on and below the minimum wage and under the age of 18 and over 65 should be entitled to a medical card;
- Immediate release of those funds committed by the government under the white paper on A Framework For Supporting Voluntary Activities.

Welfare Benefits

The National Anti-Poverty Strategy Review contained a target of increasing the lowest weekly social rate to €150 by 2007. The unexpectedly rapid increases in the cost of living means that to stay, in real terms, as it is, requires a minimum increase to €130 in this budget.

- Index welfare payments (except child dependent allowances) in line with forecasted wage growth (7.5%), which will give increases of between €9 and €11 per week in the personal rate and €5.90 to €8.50 in the Qualified Adult Allowance;
- An additional increase of €5 to the lowest welfare payments, in order to meet the welfare adequacy target of €150 per week by 2007. This would give a combined rise of €14 per week bringing it to €132.80 for the Personal rate;
- Increase Qualified Adult Allowance to a

minimum payment of €90.30.

Pensions

The gains made by older citizens in the last number of years from pension increases have largely disappeared in real terms following continuing increases in inflation, transport costs and medicine. After a lifetime in service to the state, service which must be acknowledged as having contributed to creating the foundation on which our recent economic prosperity was based, it is only right that the needs of senior citizens be met.

The National Pensions Policy Initiative set a target of 34% of average industrial earnings. We are calling for the government to increase pensions benefits to this level and automatically link it with increases in wage levels.

The weekly Living Alone Allowance has stagnated at €7.70 for a number of years and has thus fallen far behind rising costs over the last number of years. We call on the government to increase it to €15 a week.

We support the individualisation of the pensions process so that spouses are entitled to an independent personal pension.

Women

Despite decades of efforts to bring about true gender equality in Ireland differences still exist both structurally and also as a result of the continued outdated perceptions of women in Irish society. Women are still more likely to be in low paid jobs and to be most responsible for childcare.

Sinn Féin calls for:

- An end to the Limitation Rule, which reduces the actual payment received by household when two adults are each eligible for a social welfare payment. This all too often gives rise to serious problems for women;

- Resource the National Steering Committee on Violence against Women in order to fully implement the Report of the Task Force on Violence against Women;
- Introduce a payment for parental leave at the level of maternity benefit to facilitate a greater take-up rate by parents;
- Part-time Unemployment Benefit for parents with young children to recognise that these parents are unable to work full-time jobs.

Asylum Seekers

Perhaps some of the most vulnerable in Irish society are those who are newest to it, often fleeing persecution or hatred at home. Asylum seekers find themselves in a country where they may not know the language and will often be without substantial financial resources. The subsistence currently being made available to asylum seekers must be increased. Most importantly, they should be allowed to take up paid employment while waiting for their application to be processed.

Community Employment Schemes

The cutbacks in CE schemes is one of the most vicious elements of the coalition government's offensive against the poor and vulnerable in Irish society. CE schemes provide badly needed services, making up for the failures of successive governments to invest properly in public services. They provide skills, personal development and empowerment to the people on the schemes. They are an essential part of the development and community spirit of many disadvantaged areas in the state.

- The PPF pledge to fund 28,000 CE places should be honoured and maintained throughout 2003;
- Sinn Féin calls on the government to withdraw its threatened abolition of 5000 CE places.

I I. Supporting people with disabilities

It is essential that in Budget 2003 there is no attempt to roll back any of the advances made by people with disabilities in the past decade. It must be recognised that in this, as in other sectors, the tremendous opportunities of the past five years of unprecedented prosperity were not used for maximum social benefit. As a result, people with disabilities are still among the foremost of those experiencing social exclusion. Over half of those households headed by a person with a disability or long-term illness are living in relative income poverty.

The Government must make real advances in this Budget on income supports and service provision for people with disabilities. In tandem with these budgetary measures we need progress on rights-based legislation and programmes of positive action.

Sinn Féin calls for:

- Disability Allowance (currently €118.80 per week) to be increased to the level of Contributory Old Age Pension - €147.30 per week;
- Increase Mobility Allowance to €70 per week from the current €126 per month;
- Phasing out of Means Test for Carer's Allowance beginning this year with adjustment of the income limit from €191 per week to €250 per week. Review and reform of all payments and support to carers to ensure that all those providing care benefit to the maximum;
- Provide for the introduction in 2003 of a variable Cost of Disability Payment as recommended by the Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities;

- Reform of the Disabled Persons Grant (Housing Adaptions and Extensions) Scheme to abolish the differentiation between grants for work in new and existing homes. Assessment to be based purely on need and on the cost of the works involved, with upper limit raised to €30,000;
- Continuation for a further two years at least of the programme of new developments of services for people with intellectual disabilities so as to eliminate waiting lists for full-time residential services, day services and respite services.

In all our pre-Budget submissions since 1997 we have highlighted the need for real progress on Independent Living. The State must recognise in principle and in practice the right of people with disabilities to live independently. The system of payments, supports and services for people with disabilities must be suitably adapted for this purpose and an Independent Living Fund established.

I 2. Agriculture and Rural Development

This budget is being introduced at a time of serious ongoing crisis in Irish agriculture. This has been marked by further sharp falls in farm income, estimated to be 20% in real terms in 2002, and the continued exodus from the land with all the attendant consequences that that has for rural communities in general. That crisis has been exacerbated by the continued fall out from the Foot and Mouth outbreak last year, by bad weather conditions and by cuts in the prices paid to farmers for their produce.

There is also continuing evidence of the disparity in income over different farming systems and size of holdings. The extremely low level of income, particularly on small dry stock farms has been a major contributory

factor in the level of poverty among farming families and in the large numbers of farmers who find it impossible to continue in farming. Sinn Féin believes that this requires a radical overhaul of the way in which direct payments are channelled and that a Commission be established to examine the optimum strategy for Irish agriculture over the next period.

There is also a need for the state to put forward a fully integrated policy designed not only to put a stop to rural depopulation but to positively encourage people to move into rural communities. That has long been something to which lip service has been paid and yet the major urban centres, particularly along the eastern seaboard continue to expand to the detriment of the development of both urban and rural communities. To achieve this will require the addition of real substance to the commitment made under the National Development Plan to ensure that 50% of green field jobs are created in the Border Midlands and Western region. That will require that the necessary steps are taken to ensure that adequate infrastructure is put in place to cope with projected shifts in population.

It is Sinn Féin's view that agriculture cannot be treated separately from all of the other aspects of rural life. This will require a more integrated approach to rural development that takes account of all aspects of policy.

Among the measures that we would propose as part of domestic policy are those specifically designed to address current economic needs, and those we would see as part of a much broader long-term programme of rural development. At present we would like to see the following steps taken and that the budget be framed in such a way to ensure that the measures are adequately funded:

- Establishment of a Commission into the future of Irish agriculture to determine the optimum strategy to ensure the maintenance of the maximum numbers on the land; the protection of farm incomes; expansion of markets; and a transition to higher quality production

integrated with a domestic processing industry;

- An increase in funding for Rural Affairs from €52m to €100m compared to the Government proposal to cut it to €38.6m. This will allow for an expansion of existing LEADER, CERT and other rural development programmes;
- Simplification of the procedures for applying for participation in LEADER and CERT programmes;
- Greater integration of LEADER and local partnership programmes and the provision of adequate staff to ensure that programmes are implemented;
- Index linked increase in the funding available for Agricultural Education, Research and Advisory services;
- Full implementation of the commitment to ensure that 40% of places on the Boards of LEADER and other development bodies are taken up by women, compared to the current level of 20%;
- State encouragement of farmers co-operatives to promote alternative processing and marketing outlets under the control of the producers;
- Investigation by the Competition Authority into the manner in which the meat factories set the price paid to farmers;
- Maintenance of current budget for the Early Retirement Scheme;
- Increase Installation Aid for young farmers from €1.4m to €2m in place of proposed reduction to €350,000, to ensure that the transfer of land within families is facilitated, thereby encouraging greater take up of land by

young farmers with training;

- Increase the budget for the REPS programme to a level adequate to eliminate the anomalies which have been brought to the attention of the Department of Agriculture and Food;
- Tax incentives to encourage the use of disused premises in disadvantaged areas for the establishment of small businesses. Such buildings should also be used to provide accommodation for childcare and other community resources;
- Guaranteed funding for rural transport and protection of all existing services;
- An end to the closure of rural post offices;
- The implementation of a rural housing programme to tackle the serious crisis faced in many local authority areas. Also that planning procedures be amended where necessary to ensure that housing to meet local needs is not unduly delayed;
- Establishment of a Rural Development Fund with broad representation and accountability. This would have initial budget of €50m and would work to a strategy to compliment the other rural development programmes;
- A radical revision of the composition of Regional Assemblies so that they become more reflective of, and accountable to local elected representatives and community interests;
- The expansion of cross border co-operation on rural development and animal health.

I 3. Fishing

While we often hear of the substantial sums which have come to this state in the form of EU direct payments in the past 30 years, little reference is made to the massive contribution which Irish fisheries have made to the EU over the same period.

It is estimated that somewhere in the region of 36 million tonnes of fish worth €120 billion have been taken from Irish waters since 1973. At present half of all fish consumed in the EU comes from Irish waters. And yet while this state claims jurisdiction over 16% of EU fishing waters, Irish fishermen catch only 4% of the EU total.

Sinn Féin has long argued that the deal made regarding fishing amounted to the biggest betrayal of national interests on this state's entry into the EU. That position has continued to worsen and is once again under renewed threat with the current proposal to open up the 50 mile Irish box conservation area.

As part of a concerted effort to reclaim our fisheries and protect the interests of Irish fishermen, Sinn Féin proposes:

- Total opposition to any attempt to open up the Irish Box;
- Regulation of tonnage and megawatts to end speculation by the small number of big operators who control the market;
- State support to assist locally based cooperatives to assist in the processing and marketing of Irish seafood;
- The framing of a coherent and fully worked out strategy to oppose those aspects of the proposed reform of the Common Fisheries Policy that will further harm the Irish fishing industry.

I 4. Natural Resources

One of the greatest political scandals which has taken place in this state has been the selling out of our natural resources to multi-national exploration companies. The initial act in this saga was the radical change made to the licensing conditions imposed on the companies by the then Minister for Energy Ray Burke in 1987. This abolished the state's 50% stake in any find and abolished royalties.

That was followed in 1992 by the decision to lower the tax rate paid on oil and gas to 25%. Another major flaw has been the granting of so-called frontier licences which means that the licence holder can sit on a location for up to 20 years. The overall lack of state supervision has also meant that no-one can even be certain whether the companies are providing accurate reports on exploratory drilling. There has also been a distinct lack of downstream benefits either in terms of job creation or investment by the companies in locally based facilities.

The urgency of addressing this situation is emphasised by the recent report of a significant discovery of oil at the Dooish Well in the Rockall Basin. Unless the terms are radically overhauled little or no benefit from this reserve will accrue to the people of Ireland.

Apart from the fact that the circumstances of the 1987 changes demand that a full investigation be made into why they were introduced, there are a number of measures which can be taken to ensure that in future the Irish people may come to benefit from the potentially massive reserves of oil and gas that lie off our coast. In short these revolve around the need to completely revise the licensing terms for oil and gas exploration companies to ensure that proper control is established and that the state receives an adequate return from the exploitation of our natural resources.

- Restore the state's 50% stake in all finds;

- Re-establish a state exploration company that will carry out its own research and generally supervise the sector;
- Ensure that the companies pay adequate royalties;
- Make the companies pay tax at a restored 40% corporate rate;
- Abolish the so-called frontier licences;
- Ensure that any gas pipeline is built in accord with a long term plan to supply cheap safe fuel rather than to suit the needs of the companies. Such a pipeline ought also to be capable of integration into an All-Ireland grid.

The enormous benefits which might accrue are not a figment of the imagination. They can be pointed to in the manner in which Norway has managed its oil and gas reserves. For while this state frittered away the family silver to unscrupulous multi nationals the Norwegians insisted upon state led exploration and ensured that the industry was made an integral part of their overall economic structure.

Not only have the benefits turned a relatively under -developed country into one that can boast one of the highest living standards in the world, but it has also given it the confidence to deal independently with the multi nationals and the EU. Of course we do not as yet know the full extent of what lies beneath Irish waters but we can be fairly certain that it is substantial. Part of the reason we do not know has to do with the secretive manner in which the companies operate and the lack of onus on them to either conduct genuine exploration or to properly report on exploratory drills.

I 5. Invest in Justice for All

Everyone has an equal right to justice. Everyone has an equal right to security in their

communities. Everyone has an equal right to good legal information, advice, and representation, regardless of income or place of residence. Yet earlier this year, the Joseph Rowntree Report found significant inequality in access to justice for deprived communities in Ireland.

Many communities still lack adequate 24 hour policing services. Many low-income people still cannot get access to legal counsel. As we enter an era of cutbacks, how should we bridge this gap between supply and demand?

Privatisation in the area of justice is not the answer. Privatised or partially privatised prisons and policing are not delivering the promised significant cost-savings in other parts of the world. They are not delivering “value for money”. In some parts of the world, privatisation is creating significant problems of its own.

Instead, we need to begin the process of identifying and examining high economic/social cost, low-social yield policies.

Ireland’s penal policy provides a prime example:

Despite having one of the lowest crime rates in Europe, Ireland has one of the highest recidivism rates at 89%, and our prison population has increased by 50% since the mid-1990s.

Despite the fact that our prison system has been condemned for low standards, it is one of the most expensive in the world at €50,000 per prisoner per annum.

Ireland’s high rate of expensive imprisonment is primarily being used to imprison young people and those not convicted of serious crimes. It is not rehabilitating the prisoners. Such a system could not be described as providing “value for money”.

Imprisonment is neither cost-effective nor socially effective, and it is time for a major re-

evaluation of this high-cost/low yield budget item.

Throughout the justice system, we need to identify areas and alternatives for more effective investment, to ensure justice for all, and to reduce demand for the capital-intensive end of justice (court proceedings and imprisonment). We need a service audit and needs assessment to generate investment targets with the objective of modernising the justice system – from the policing service through the courts and the penal system.

Sinn Féin calls for the Government to:

Increase social spending

Social spending on education, job creation, housing, healthcare (including mental healthcare) and adequate community infrastructure development (including recreational amenities and programming) is investment that can cut future justice costs by reducing crime and recidivism.

Invest in prisoner education and rehabilitative programmes

We must focus spending on getting and keeping people out of prison, and on helping them build socially and economically productive lives. While it seems attractive to spend less on prisoners, the reality is that cuts in spending on prisoner services will only drive up costs under other budget lines (such as policing or social welfare).

Review deployment of Garda Síochána

We need a comprehensive review of Garda resource deployment in this state, resulting in an investment and redeployment strategy. Such a review must be undertaken in consultation with both the Gardaí and the communities they serve.

Target goal:

Everyone has access to an adequate 24-hour policing service in their home community.

Enforcement is resource-intensive, but providing an effective deterrent through visible presence may contribute to an ultimate reduction in comparably intensive court and penal costs. It can also offset other costs associated with a lack of enforcement (emergency services, healthcare costs, loss of productivity).

Provide adequate funds to Legal Aid and Community Legal Services

Target goals:

End unacceptably long waiting lists for free legal advice.

Everyone has access to legal representation and redress based on need, regardless of income.

Investigate and invest in alternatives

Community policing

Community and neighbourhood mediation services

Community restorative justice as an alternative to imprisonment for less serious crimes

All of these are lower-cost alternatives that have a higher social yield.

Institute a positive immigration policy

Contrary to popular misconception, immigrants are an economic benefit to Ireland. Immigrant-driven economies are dynamic. Immigrants tend to be young, entrepreneurial, and economically productive. Our own experience of migration, and the incredible productivity of the Irish abroad shows us the truth of this. Immigrants do NOT drain scarce public resources, they generally make a net contribution to the public purse. In Britain immigrants raise revenue equivalent to a 1% tax increase.

Encouraging immigrants and allowing them to work once here will raise tax revenue and

boost spending in the economy. Ireland needs a positive immigration policy to reflect this potential.

We must end the punitive Direct Provision policy that prevents refugees from working while their claims are being processed. Most asylum applicants could be productive in employment if given the chance. Those who earn an income and pay taxes could likely offset those who are unable to work or unable to find suitable work.

The present work-permit system must be reformed so that permits are granted to employees, not employers.

Sinn Féin calls for Budget 2003 to:

Eliminate the Secret Service Vote and ringfence funds for redeployment

The Department of Justice says there is no Secret Service structure in this state. They also acknowledge that no foreign agents were intercepted, arrested, detained or deported since 1990 as a result of spending on the Secret Service. But this “non-existent” body continues to command a budget of more than three quarters of a million euro.

The €831,000 proposed for the Secret Service Vote in Budget 2003 would be more usefully redeployed to voluntary groups aiding survivors of violent crime, and that is what Sinn Féin proposes.

Invest in Comprehensive Programmes to Eliminate Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse

Nearly half of all Irish women experience physical or sexual violence at some point in their lives. Add to those the high numbers of male children affected by abuse – and factor in those adults abused as children who will go on to repeat these patterns of behaviour in intergenerational cycles of violence – and the proportion of the affected population spirals higher.

It is now time for recognition of the extent of domestic and sexual violence and abuse, and for prioritised spending to eradicate this scourge. Failure to do so will cost both Irish society and the Exchequer more – in resource-intensive court and prison time, in healthcare costs, and in lost productivity.

At minimum, we urgently need:

- Funding for at least one women’s refuge in every county in this state;
- Funding of the National Domestic Violence Intervention Programme on a pilot basis;
- Funding for adequate support services for both survivors and perpetrators of violence, equally available regardless of place of residence;
- Funding for comprehensive national anti-violence education programmes, to stop the cycle of violence.

Diverting funds from the Secret Service Vote could help kickstart this investment.

I 6. No hidden spending on militarisation, no hidden cuts to peace keeping

As part of its commitment to the EU’s Rapid Reaction Force, Ireland has agreed to the “Helsinki Headline Goal” of providing 850 troops for deployment by 2003.

In a climate of cutbacks where the most vulnerable in our population are being hit hardest, and while their needs remain unmet by social spending, there can be no justification for additional defence spending to finance participation in the European Rapid Reaction Force, nor to bring the Irish Defence Forces up to NATO standard for the purposes of participation in NATO’s “Partnership for Peace”.

Likewise, neither troops nor defence spending should be diverted from what would otherwise be available for UN peacekeeping commitments to make up the shortfall.

17. AID SPENDING: SHARE THE WEALTH – LOCALLY and GLOBALLY

Ireland is now the third wealthiest state in the world, according to the UNDP.

The Government was quite right to pledge to increase Ireland's Official Development Aid (ODA) to the UN Target of 0.7% of GNP. We can well afford it.

But not only did this year's ODA spend NOT increase to the interim target of 0.45%, it will ultimately be more than €30 million less than originally promised, as a result of the McCreedy Cuts. Amidst our unprecedented plenty, this is a scandal.

The Government reassures us that the 0.7% target can still be reached by 2007, but this is not good enough. The stakes involved in delay could not be higher: starvation, disease, deprivation, and death. Fulfilment of this ODA commitment cannot be held hostage to another boom, nor to the whims of a Finance Minister. We cannot assume that the Irish economy will return to Celtic Tiger levels anytime soon. Indeed, if a boom was the only precondition to increased aid, Ireland would have met the UN target several years ago when our economy was at its height.

What is needed now is the political will to put our money where our mouth is on aid, to share the wealth globally (as well as locally).

Sinn Féin calls for Budget 2003 to:

- Increase ODA to 0.7% as promised by the Taoiseach at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in

Johannesburg;

- At minimum, increase the 2003 spend to 0.48% or €441 million, and publish a schedule for increasing ODA by 0.06% per year 2003-2007, as recommended by Dóchas, and stick to these commitments;
- Ringfence ODA, and end the practice of year-on-year budget negotiations.

Sinn Féin also calls on the Government to:

- Ensure all Irish ODA is "untied" – including that administered through the EU;
- Compliment Ireland's ODA contribution by committing to the introduction of a "Tobin Tax" on currency speculation, and to audit and earmark the revenue generated for the eradication of global poverty and disease, and protection of the global commons;
- Stand behind its commitment to Third World debt cancellation.

18. An Ghaeilge

Bhí sé geallta ag an rialtas Bille Teanga a chur os comhair an Oireachtais i 1999, i 2000, i 2001 agus i 2002. Anois ní bheidh sé ann roimh 2003. Tá sé seo míthaitneamhach. Bheadh sé mar chuspóir ag an Bille seo ní hamháin cearta teanga a chosaint ach iad a chur chun cinn. Taobh leis an mBille tá gá le maoiniú ceart don Ghaeilge ón Stát. Le blianta beaga anuas tá an maoiniú seo tar éis sleamhnú. Má leanann an sleamhnú seo ní bheidh an Stát féin ná earnáil dheonach na Gaeilge in ann Bille Teanga a chur i bhfeidhm.

Molann Sinn Féin:-

- Buiséad Foras na Gaeilge a dhúbailt go €28m.

- Cinntiú de go bhfuil go leor airgead ag TG4 chun an caigheán iontach craolachán atá acu a choimeád;
- Céadatán níos mó do na heagrais deonacha chun chur lena ngairmiúlachas agus lena gcuid scéimeanna chun an Ghaeilge a chur chun cinn.

The Irish Language

The Government promised an Irish Language Bill in 1999, 2000, 2001 and 2002 but now we are told it will not be ready before early 2003. This delay is totally unacceptable.

The aim of this Bill would be not only to defend the rights of Irish speakers but actively to promote them. Alongside this Bill there is a need for State funding for Irish. In recent years this funding has decreased. If the decrease continues then neither the State nor the Irish-language voluntary sector will be in a position to implement a Language Act.

Sinn Féin proposes:

- Doubling of funding for Foras na Gaeilge to €28m;
- Insure that TG4 has sufficient funding to enable it to continue its excellent broadcasting standard;
- Increased percentage of funding from Foras na Gaeilge for the Irish-language organisations to increase their professionalism and assist their efforts to promote Irish.