

AN ACTION PROGRAMME FOR THE MILLENNIUM



**PROGRAMME OF THE
FIANNA FÁIL - PROGRESSIVE DEMOCRATS
PARTNERSHIP GOVERNMENT**

**FOUR YEAR PROGRESS REPORT
SEPTEMBER 2001**

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past four years Fianna Fáil and the Progressive Democrats, in government, with Independent support in the Dáil, have provided this country with good government and have been an active, reformist administration.

This Government has taken the view that the privilege of office must never be squandered. We've taken the view that when you are given the great privilege of office in this country you must use that to do what is right for all the people of Ireland. Over the last four years, we have been responsible for the most sustained and significant strengthening of the Irish economy.

Most importantly we have worked tirelessly for peace in Northern Ireland. The Government's priority on entering office was to create a lasting peace. Within three weeks, the restoration of the IRA ceasefire cleared the way for the inclusive multi-party talks. These concluded with the historic Good Friday Agreement. Most aspects of the Agreement have since been implemented. The Government is continuing to work closely with the British Government and with the political parties in Northern Ireland to secure the implementation of outstanding aspects of the Agreement.

In implementing our commitments, we have brought forward and progressed the most comprehensive legislative programmes in the history of this State. Since this government took office on 26th June 1997, an unprecedented 179 bills have been enacted. This includes a radical package to restore confidence in public life, which contains the groundbreaking Standards in Public Office Bill as well as the first anti- corruption legislation in 85 years.

This country is now enjoying the highest levels of employment in our history. Fianna Fáil and the Progressive Democrats have generated more than 300,000 jobs. We have cut unemployment to its lowest level since modern statistics commenced. We have substantially increased the real incomes of Irish men and women. We have boosted the productivity of the Irish workforce. We have successfully introduced major reform of our taxation system while at the same time putting more money back in people's pockets and improving people's quality of life.

It is an undeniable fact that the social components of our policies, far exceed the efforts of any previous Government. This is because at the heart of this Government's economic strategy are two commitments which reinforce and strengthen one another. A commitment to sustain economic growth and prosperity and a commitment that we focus our efforts on building new realities, opportunity, equality and a caring society for all our people, young and old.

We want an Ireland that is grounded in the principles of equality and fairness and that is why we have brought forward record advances in social inclusion measures, social welfare improvements, old age pensions, child benefit, personal tax reductions, taking people out of the tax net, and in funding services for people with disabilities.

The last four years has been an enormously successful period for this country. That success is founded on the fact that this government has delivered on its promises. For too long, the Irish people voted for one set of policies but got another. This Government has been different. We have done what we said we would do. We have kept our word and we are delivering a better Ireland for everyone.

Our core promises at the last election were to cut unemployment, to cut taxes, to cut crime, and to work to build a lasting peace on this island. We have delivered spectacularly on all of these.

The cornerstone of our work was set out in our Government Action Programme. The Action Programme and its mid-term Review contain 535 specific commitments and four years after the last election some three-quarters plus of the objectives and action points have been achieved or significant progress has been delivered.

Fianna Fáil and the Progressive Democrats are proud of the record of this Government in putting before the people an ambitious programme, earning their support and implementing its promises in office. Over the course of the next year we will complete this work and be in a position to present to people at the next election an unprecedented record of delivery and achievement.

Bertie Ahern, TD.

Mary Harney, TD

Taoiseach.

Tánaiste.

Leader of Fianna Fáil

Leader of the Progressive Democrats

FOUR YEARS OF GOVERNMENT

FOUR YEARS OF UNPRECEDENTED PROGRESS

SUMMARY OF MAIN GOVERNMENT ACHIEVEMENTS

NORTHERN IRELAND

- Second IRA ceasefire now in place four years;
- Multiparty negotiations restarted and concluded with Good Friday Agreement;
- Most aspects of Agreement implemented;
- Institutions - cross-community Executive, North/South Ministerial Council and Implementation Bodies, British-Irish Council and Intergovernmental Conference - established
- Progress continuing towards implementation of outstanding issues – an agreed new beginning for policing, putting arms beyond use, British demilitarisation and the inclusive operation of the institutions.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

- Successful election to the UN Security Council for 2 year term from 1 January 2001
- Active participation in the negotiations leading up to the adoption of the UN Millennium Summit Declaration in September 2000 Progress in EU enlargement negotiations
- Significant development of political, economic and trade relations with Asia
- Commitment to reach UN Development Cooperation target of 0.7% of GNP by 2007 with an interim target of 0.45% of GNP by end of 2002 now in place
- Establishment of Review of Irish Aid Programme
- Continued pressure for a revitalisation of the international response to the HIV/AIDS crisis both in the EU and UN, backed by an increase in Government funding of \$30M for international AIDS projects.
- Ratification of the UN Convention on the elimination of all forms of racial discrimination
- In process of establishing resident missions in all the EU candidate countries over a two-year period.

TAXATION AND ECONOMY

- Growth in numbers at work by 80,000 in 2000 alone.
- Unemployment rate at 3.6%, the lowest rate since records began.
- Taxation and social inclusion commitments of Partnership 2000 achieved in two years, a year earlier than expected.
- Introduction of a tax credit system
- Successful qualification for Economic and Monetary Union.
- Significant progress in implementing our tax commitments.
- 38% of income earners now outside the tax net.
- Proportion of income earners on the higher tax rate falls to a record low of 23%.
- 35,000 elderly persons taken out of the tax net.
- Standard rate of tax cut by 6% to 20%.
- Higher rate of income tax cut by 6% to 42% over our four budgets.
- Regions of the Border, Midlands and the West to retain full Objective One status up to 2006.
- National Development Plan 2000-2006 provides for a total public investment of £40.6 billion.
- Considerable progress made in establishing the policy platform for Public Private Partnerships.
- Programme for Prosperity and Fairness successfully negotiated with social partners.
- Reduction in the rate of inflation.
- Most ambitious Decentralisation Programme in the history of the State.
- National Pensions Reserve Fund established.

CRIME

- Crime cut by 25% over the past four years.
- Garda force numbers up by over 800.

- £12 million allocated towards the installation of CCTV systems nationwide over the next three years.
- £87 million being made available for an integrated programme for combating crime by addressing social inclusion through employment.
- Groundbreaking Sex Offenders Act introduces a new notification procedure or tracking system for all convicted sex offenders.
- Children Act provides the statutory framework for the development of a new juvenile justice system.
- Criminal Justice (Theft and Fraud Offences) Bill to provide a comprehensive code to deal with crimes such as theft, forgery and counterfeiting.
- Comprehensive Charter for the Victims of Crime implemented.
- Hard hitting anti-drugs legislation such as the Criminal Justice Act, 1999, introduced.
- Drug seizures with an estimated street value of almost £134 million between 1998 and 2000.
- Pilot Drug Court Programme launched earlier this year.
- National Crime Forum established.
- First ever National Crime Council established.
- 100% increase in funding for the Probation and Welfare Service.
- Additional 1,207 prison places provided to date.

EQUALITY

- Employment Equality Act, 1998, now in force prohibiting discrimination in the area of employment on nine grounds.
- Equal Status Act, 2000, protects against discrimination outside the field of employment.
- Increases in maternity and adoptive leave.
- Childcare highlighted as a priority area for investment in National Development Plan.
- National Disability Authority operating as a research and standards body for disability services and an advisory body for disability policy and practice.
- Work on preparation of Disabilities Bill underway.

- Traveller Communications Strategy three year programme.

IMMIGRATION AND ASYLUM

- Illegal Immigrants (Trafficking) Act to address the well documented role of organised criminal elements in trafficking illegal immigrants across borders.
- Work progressing on an immigration and residence bill.
- Immigration (Carriers Liability) Bill to make it an offence for carriers to bring improperly documented non-nationals into the State.
- Re-admission Agreement with the Government of Romania.
- Garda National Immigration Bureau established.
- Allocation of substantial additional resources including 370 additional staff.
- National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism established.
- National anti-racism public awareness programme.

HEALTH & CHILDREN

- 100% increase in health spending
- Health funding surpasses £5 billion threshold for first time ever.
- £2 billion provided for capital investment by Health Boards /Authorities in the health service.
- Value for Money Audit of the health system undertaken.
- 25% drop in waiting lists
- Continued progress in implementing the recommendations of the Review Group on the Waiting List Initiative.
- Commission on Nursing Report being implemented.
- Extra 300 student nurse-training places created last year.
- Major new nursing recruitment and retention initiative.
- Enhanced pay and career structures for health professionals.
- National Task Force to prepare a detailed implementation programme on reducing Non Consultant Hospital Doctors working hours.
- Continued commitment in implementing National Cancer Strategy.

- Age at which tobacco products can be sold to young persons has been raised.
- Office of Tobacco Control established.
- Substantial progress in implementing our Cardiovascular Health Strategy.
- Phase One of the National Cervical Screening Programme commenced.
- National Health Promotion Strategy launched.
- Substantially improved mental health and autistic services.
- New Mental Health Act provides for the establishment of an independent agency to be known as the Mental Health Commission.
- Medical card eligibility extended to all people over 70 years of age.
- £12.4 million in development funding provided for palliative care since 1997.
- Progress towards establishment of an Irish heart and lung transplant facility.
- Additional £2.3 million provided this year for services relating to violence against women.
- Social Services Inspectorate established to play a central role in the ongoing monitoring of child protection standards.
- 10 Year National Children's Strategy launched.
- National Children's Office established to co-ordinate and monitor progress on the implementation of the Strategy.
- Nursing home subvention significantly increased.
- Significant investment in the development of care services for people with disabilities.
- New Health Strategy to set out a vision for a well-resourced, efficiently run, patient-centred and world-class health service.
- Most far-reaching consultation process ever used in the health area to ensure that everyone's voice is heard.

DRUGS & URBAN REGENERATION

- Young People's Facilities and Services Fund to develop youth facilities and services in areas where there is a significant drugs problem.
- Treatment facilities for heroin users dramatically increased.
- Nationwide rehabilitation services for drug addicts.
- Review of National Drugs Strategy completed and launched.
- Ballymun Regeneration programme to ensure new beginning for the area.
- Integrated Services Process (ISP) coordinating and delivering state services in disadvantaged urban areas in a radical new way.
- RAPID Programme targeting 25 most deprived urban neighbourhoods in the State for special treatment.

BUILDING AN INCLUSIVE SOCIETY

- National Anti-Poverty Strategy goals, with an original target of 2007, now achieved.
- Report of the Commission on the Family making a positive contribution to developing policies.
- Significant extra funding to the Family Mediation Service and to Marriage and Child Counselling and Family and Community Centres.
- £12 million provided for the development of family services projects.
- New widowed parent grant of £1,000 introduced.
- Five-fold increase in the Bereavement Grant.
- Pro-active measures to encourage lone parents to return to workforce.
- Unemployment reduced to one of the lowest levels in the EU.
- Employment supports account for an unprecedented 24% of total unemployment/employment spending.
- Increased number of places on Back to Work Scheme.
- Family Income Supplement being paid on net income basis.
- Back to Education programme benefiting unemployed and people with disabilities.

- Substantial improvements in the rates of Child Benefit.
- Significant improvements in social welfare schemes amounting to almost £1.8 billion over past 4 years.
- Introduced the first ever National Minimum Wage, which is set at the highest level in Europe.
- Rate of old age contributory pension (£106 per week) exceeds our £100 target.
- Total of £19.5 million for the Scheme of Community Grants for Older People.
- Wide range of increases both in terms of income supports and in terms of services provided for Carers.
- Radical and innovative Carers Benefit scheme introduced.
- Comhairle established to support the provision of independent information, advice and advocacy services for everybody, including those with disabilities.

EDUCATION

- More than £800 million being provided for primary and post-primary buildings.
- Schools Information Technology Programme making a major impact.
- Almost 60,000 multimedia computers in Irish schools.
- Education Technology Investment Fund established with unprecedented exchequer support.
- 5,400 third-level places created in engineering and computer hardware and software areas.
- Specific funding for research and development in third-level institutions being provided for first time ever.
- £1.9 billion allocated to Research, Technological Development and Innovation in NDP.
- Irish Research Council for Humanities and Social Sciences established.
- Largest ever increase in direct funding for primary schools.
- 58% increase in the standard capitation rate.
- Pupil: Teacher ratios cut to the lowest level in history.

- Teacher training places more than doubled.
- Review of the Teacher In-Career Development Programme to assist individual teachers to access high-quality courses of their choice.
- Commission reviewing operation and effects of points system.
- Legislation passed to establish a 'Teaching Council'.
- Revised primary curriculum launched, first significant revision of curriculum in 30 years.
- Major initiative underway to promote science in schools.
- £194 million of additional funding over three years (2000-2002) for action in tackling educational disadvantage.
- Early School Leavers Initiative and the Stay in School Initiative, to identify and help children aged 8-15 at risk of dropping out of school.
- Education (Welfare) Act to radically overhaul school attendance legislation.
- Abolition of examination fees for all families with a medical card.
- Youthreach and Traveller Training courses targeted at early-school leavers aged 15-18.
- White Paper on early childhood education.
- Adult Literacy Budget increased massively from less than £0.85 million in 1997 to almost £10.68 million.
- Remedial teacher service extended to all primary schools and Home/School Community Liaison Service to all primary schools with disadvantaged status.
- First ever national initiative to improve reading standards launched.
- Comprehensive drug awareness programme for schools.
- Government committed to providing comprehensive educational and training service to everyone with special needs in the country.

ENVIRONMENT AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

- Major National Environmental Awareness Campaign.
- Comhar, the National Sustainable Development Partnership, established and now active participant in environment policy development.

- Environmental Network of Government Departments providing environmental integration across Government policies.
- Intensive and multi-faceted drive to improve water quality.
- Development of our water/waste water infrastructure moving ahead at rapid pace.
- National Climate Strategy approved and published.
- Litter Action Plan launched as a national anti-litter strategy.
- Air quality protection measures.
- £650 million investment in waste management under the National Development Plan.
- Levy on plastic bags and a landfill levy.
- Local Government Fund delivering significant additional resources for local government.
- Local Government Act, 2001, includes provisions for the direct election of mayors/chairs.
- Overall investment in national road network up 170% in our four years in office.
- Comprehensive progress on road safety.
- Investment in non-national roads up 82%.
- Legislation to underpin the introduction of a penalty points system on our roads.

HOUSING

- Supply-boosting measures such as the Serviced Land Initiative, higher residential densities and a new local authority affordable housing scheme.
- Higher rates of stamp duty for investors.
- Housing output in 2000 at record level of almost 50,000 units.
- Rising house prices tackled.
- Unprecedented £6.9 billion being devoted to social and affordable housing measures over the period to 2006.
- Highest level of local authority housing work in progress since 1985.

- Wide ranging proposals for major reforms announced in response to the Commission on the Private Rented Sector's report.
- Incentives to encourage provision of rented accommodation for students.
- Homelessness action plan for Dublin area.
- Homeless Agency established.
- Strong legislative base to support provision of accommodation for travelling community.
- Planning and Development Act, 2000, most significant piece of planning legislation for nearly 40 years.
- Increased resources for An Bord Pleanála.
- Delivery of more professional planners in the local authority service.
- Substantial progress on preparation of National Spatial Strategy.
- Town Renewal Scheme aimed at enhancing their attractiveness as places in which to live, work and do business.
- Urban renewal scheme benefiting 49 cities and towns.

ENTERPRISE, TRADE AND EMPLOYMENT

- Extra 310,000 persons at work since June 1997.
- Long-term unemployment cut to 1.2%.
- Employment Action Plan 2001 to build on our achievements to date.
- FÁS Employment Service substantially expanded.
- Local Employment Service extended.
- National Training Fund established to provide a new resource base for training of people for, and in, employment.
- Task Force on Lifelong Learning now preparing its report.
- Social Economy Programme launched to ensure provision of social and community-related services.
- Ireland ranked seventh in this year's World Competitiveness Report.

- New structures for Company Law Enforcement and regulation of the financial services sector significantly advanced.
- Company Law Review Group set up.
- Carers Leave Act designed to protect by law the employment rights of the carer over the period of his/her leave.
- Technology Foresight Fund established to support world-class research in niche areas of Information and Communication Technologies and Biotechnology.
- Initiatives to make Ireland 'Telework friendly.'
- Competition Bill to strengthen existing legislation.
- Programme of reform of intellectual property law underway.
- Balanced regional development now the main focus of IDA Ireland's activity.

AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

- Major success in protecting the agriculture sector and the wider economy from the threat of foot and mouth disease.
- Sheep tagging introduced and legislation on control of animal movement strengthened.
- Substantial rise in average income in farming in 2000.
- Direct payments to farmers accounting for 56% of aggregate farm income.
- Farm Assist Scheme improved and enhanced.
- Huge commitment to public investment - £6.7 billion over seven years - in actions that will impact directly on rural areas.
- Significant extra funding for Rural Environment Protection Scheme and the Early Retirement Scheme as well as the new area-based Compensatory Allowance in Disadvantaged Areas.
- Teagasc allocated a fund of £25 million to recruit new scientists, invest in new facilities and to enable it participate in £560 million Foresight Fund.
- £10 million provided for capital investment in education and facilities for agricultural colleges over the next five years.
- REPS participation to increase from 45,000 to 70,000 farmers by 2006.

- Increase in food exports from £4.7 billion to an estimated £5.4 billion.
- Funding of £282 million targeted at food industry in NDP.
- Implementation of a range of measures to enhance food safety.
- Major success against the odds at reform of CAP under Agenda 2000.
- Plan of Action published in response to the Agri-Food 2010 Report.

MARINE AND NATURAL RESOURCES

- Total investment of some £320 million in the seafood sector over the lifetime of the NDP.
- Largest investment in fishing fleet renewal since the foundation of the State.
- New initiative, involving total investment of £30 million, to support innovation and sustainability in the fisheries sector, as well as investment of £70 million to develop the seafood processing industry. Funding of £6 million provided also for seafood marketing.
- Investment of £60 million to assist the further development of the aquaculture sector. Sector's sustainable development underpinned also by the streamlined licensing process, and by the introduction of coordinated local aquaculture management systems (CLAMS).
- Major investment of £66 million under the NDP in fishery harbours and landing places.
- Management of State's Fishery Harbour Centres being reviewed.
- New safety regulations for fishing vessels, and funding provided to install essential safety and life saving equipment.
- New and extended training facilities provided for the fishing industry, and investment of £11 million under the NDP in training for the seafood sector.
- Reports from the National Common Fisheries Policy Strategy Group informing of Ireland's active involvement in discussions on the future of the CFP.
- Ireland taking the lead in Europe in pressing for further innovative stock conservation measures, following the introduction of the Irish Sea Cod Recovery Programme.
- Inshore Fisheries Committees established and facilitators appointed around the coast to empower local communities in shaping policy and initiatives for their areas.

- National Biotoxins Monitoring and Testing Programme radically overhauled, to ensure high safety standards for Irish seafood.
- Major programme of Marine RTDI (Research, Technological Development and Innovation) including comprehensive £21 million survey of Irish seabed underway.
- £25 million contract signed for second dedicated marine research vessel, following introduction of the “Celtic Voyager” in 1997.
- National Salmon Commission established as a forum for all salmon interests.
- New management structures for inland fisheries introduced, and development of local management approaches being pursued actively.
- Investment of £31 million under the NDP in developing recreational and tourism angling.
- Major programme of coastal protection, involving investment of £41 million, under the NDP.
- First ever dedicated marine tourism and leisure investment programme (£30 million).
- NDP investment programme £121 million to be invested in seaports.
- Port Companies established pursuant to Harbours (Amendment) Act, 1996.
- Single Port Company established for Shannon Estuary.
- Task forces on use of port lands and traffic related issues at ports established.
- Competitive fiscal regime put in place, and Irish Maritime Development Office established, to support development of a strong merchant-shipping sector.
- Irish Coast Guard established and remit extended to include inland waterways.
- Marine Casualty Investigation Board being established, following enactment of legislation.
- Regulations for jet-skis and fast power craft introduced.
- Legislation enacted for regulation of adventure centres and activities.
- Proposals for integrated coastal zone management and administration being advanced.
- Continuing active support for minerals, oil and gas exploration; Corrib Gasfield declared commercial in January 2001 and first gas scheduled to be landed in 2003.

- Investment of over £700 million in the forestry sector under the NDP.
- Significant increases (of over 30%) secured in the financial incentives for all afforestation carried out since 2000, and considerable progress made in securing substantial increases for those who planted in earlier years.

DEFENCE

- First White Paper on Defence in the history of the State published.
- New, unprecedented £250 million investment programme in equipment and infrastructure.
- Comprehensive integrated personnel management plan for Defence Forces.
- Policy of regular recruitment in place in order to achieve improved age profile in the Permanent Defence Force.
- Implementation plans for new organisational structures in Air Corps and Naval Service.
- Significant steps taken to provide basis for future development of Civil Defence.

ETHICS

- Review Group on Auditing established to review the regulation, operation and professional standards in the accounting and auditing profession.
- Groundbreaking Standards in Public Office Act, 2001, passed into law.
- Local Government (Disclosure of Donations and Expenditure) Act, 1999, provides for disclosure of donations over £500.
- Prevention of Corruption (Amendment) Act, 2001, first anti-corruption Bill in 85 years.
- Local Government Act, 2001, sets out for the first time a comprehensive ethics framework / standards regime for Local Government.
- Further ambitious programme of extensions to Freedom of Information Act.
- Legislation being developed to provide for registration of lobbyists and for greater transparency in their activities.
- Whistleblowers legislation to provide for protection of persons who bring to light breaches of the law in public and other bodies.

- Legislative proposals to require every public representative to deposit donations received for political purposes into a special account.

TOURISM & SPORT

- Increase in overseas visitor numbers since 1997 by 25% to 6.4 million in 2000.
- Foreign earning from tourism to reach an all-time high of £3 billion.
- Tourism providing jobs for 145,000 people (1 in every 12 people in the workforce).
- Major new promotional and destination marketing campaigns. Highest ever level of State funding for tourism promotion, including special Foot & Mouth reassurance campaign.
- First ever Tourism Marketing Fund with a provision of £150 million over the period of the National Development Plan.
- New all-island tourism marketing company, Tourism Ireland Ltd (TIL).
- Funding of £100 million in NDP to specifically support new investment in tourism product development in underdeveloped and developing regions.
- Further £100 million in NDP to help address challenges in training, recruitment and staff retention in the tourism sector.
- Six-fold increase in sports funding over our four years in office.
- Unprecedented development of local and national facilities including the long awaited 50-metre swimming pool.
- £85 million to be allocated for the provision of community sport and recreational facilities at centres throughout the country.
- Landmark commitment to build a new national stadium that will match the best facilities anywhere else in the world.
- Funding for local authority swimming pool programme increased from £3 million in 1999 to £15 million per year for the period 2000-2002.
- New National Sports Council established on a statutory basis.
- First ever anti-doping in sport programme commenced.
- Ireland successful in its bid to host 2003 Special Olympics and the 2005 Ryder Cup.

ARTS, HERITAGE, GAELTACHT & THE ISLANDS

- Largest ever annual increase in Arts Council funding.
- Completion of the first Arts Plan a full year ahead of the timescale set out by the previous government.
- Unprecedented financial commitment of £100 million over the period of the Plan to allow the Arts Council to implement the Second Arts Plan in full.
- Government approval for drafting of new Arts Bill.
- Overall investment of close on £65 million in arts and cultural infrastructure.
- Total of £36 million allocated to ACCESS scheme over four years 2001 - 2004.
- Progress towards establishment of independent and autonomous Academy for Performing Arts.
- Charges abolished for school groups to all Heritage Sites.
- Music Board of Ireland established.
- Film Industry Strategy Review Group to formulate proposals for a strategic plan for the future of the industry into the next decade.
- Additional resources allocated to Irish Film Board.
- Screen Commission to promote Ireland as a location and centre of excellence for film-making.
- Significantly increased funding made available to the main national cultural institutions.
- Major expansion scheme for the National Archives.
- Broadcasting Act, 2001, to facilitate introduction of digital terrestrial broadcasting.
- Major Events Television Coverage Act to protect viewing of major domestic sporting events on free air to television.
- First ever integrated plan for national heritage in preparation.
- Wildlife Amendment Act, 2000, a major modernisation of the legislation position in the wildlife area.

- Review of implementation of Habitats Directive.
- Most comprehensive set of measures for protection of our architectural heritage since the foundation of the State.
- Integrated £100 million strategy for the conservation, preservation and presentation of National Monuments in the period to 2006.
- Waterways Ireland established under the British Irish Agreement Act, 1999.
- Interdepartmental Committee on Islands, Gaeltacht and Irish Language to ensure policies are implemented effectively.
- Government approval for General Scheme of the Official Languages Equality Bill.
- Special Commission on the Irish Language in the Gaeltacht.
- Increased investment programmes in access for offshore islands and infrastructural improvements in Gaeltacht areas.

TRANSPORT

- National Development Plan sets out a £2.2 billion medium term investment strategy.
- Full service on Greystones and Malahide DART line.
- Purchase of 275 additional buses to increase fleet by 28%.
- Expanded services in DART and suburban rail services.
- DART capacity to increase by almost 40% and suburban rail by over 25%.
- Significant progress made on Dublin light rail (LUAS) project.
- Overall progress on construction of system on target for completion in 2003.
- Government approval for development of metro system for Dublin.
- £50 million to promote transport integration in a practical way.
- £150 million for regional transport system.
- Investment of £500 million in mainline rail over period 2000-2006.
- Progress in regulation of bus market.
- New sustainable air routes to and from Ireland introduced.

- £11 million allocation to support essential infrastructure improvements at regional airports.
- The Commission for Aviation Regulation was established.

PUBLIC ENTERPRISE / E-COMMERCE

- Ireland seamlessly connected on the Global Crossing network to 36 European cities and the US.
- World-class telehouse constructed offering point of interconnection in Dublin to the Global Crossing Network.
- E-Commerce Act, which legislates for electronic contracts and signatures. Joint US-Ireland Communiqué on Electronic Commerce.
- European Communities (internal Market in Electricity) Regulations, 2000, provide for the establishment of the independent electricity transmission system operator, EirGrid.
- Comprehensive legislation in preparation to provide for further enhancement of effectiveness of regulatory framework for communications.
- Electricity Regulation Act, 1999, represents first phase in liberalisation of the electricity market in Ireland.
- Electricity (Supply) (Amendment) Act, 2001, provided for immediate full liberalisation of Combined Heat and Power market.
- New Electricity Bill at advanced stage of preparation to complete liberalisation of access to the electricity market.
- Bord Gais Eireann continues with its efforts to extend gas grid.
- Edenderry peat-fired power station in operation.
- Green Paper on Sustainable Energy published.
- Sellafield concerns continue to be raised at every available opportunity in the relevant international and EU fora.
- Re-affirmed commitment to nationwide post office and Government Services network throughout State.

GOVERNMENT'S FOUR YEAR PROGRESS REPORT

NORTHERN IRELAND

The Government's priority on entering office was to create a lasting peace on this island based on justice, friendship and cooperation between people of different traditions.

Progress was immediate. Within three weeks, the **restoration of the IRA ceasefire** cleared the way for the inclusive multi-party talks. These concluded on 10 April 1998 with the historic **Good Friday Agreement** to which the people, North and South, gave their overwhelming endorsement in the referendums of 22 May 1998.

Most aspects of the Agreement have since been implemented. On 2 December 1999, the institutions under the Agreement were established and the amendments to Articles 2 and 3 of the Constitution, enshrining in particular the principle of consent, took effect.

The Government has established a Human Rights Commission and enacted far-reaching equality legislation. The Government has honoured fully their commitment to work towards reconciliation, and, in the period since the Agreement, we have provided over £6m in funding to groups and organisations working in this area through its Reconciliation Fund. North/South cooperation is being developed through the North/South Ministerial Council and the Government has worked to develop and to deepen our friendly relations with Britain, including through the British-Irish Council and through the opening of Consulates in Edinburgh and Cardiff.

The Government are continuing to work closely with the British Government and with the political parties in Northern Ireland to secure the implementation of outstanding aspects of the Agreement - an agreed new beginning on policing, demilitarisation, decommissioning and the inclusive operation of the institutions.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

In the Review of our Programme for Government (1999), we pledged to ensure that in the institutional changes and reforms to accommodate an enlarged Union, Ireland would retain a distinctive voice in all the institutions.

In developments to date, including at last year's Intergovernmental Conference, the Government was successful in ensuring that Ireland will continue to play a key role in all the Union's Institutions.

The Government will continue to reflect on the concerns indicated by the result of the referendum on the Treaty of Nice, while bearing in mind our commitment to the enlargement process and the strong support of our EU Partners, and the applicant States, for the Treaty as agreed at Nice. To assist in that reflection, the Government will establish a **Forum on Europe** to allow the widest possible public debate on issues relating to the future development of the Union. The Government has also decided that resident missions will be opened in all the EU candidate countries over a two year period.

In the economic sphere, the promotion of Ireland's economic interests abroad, making full use of our network of diplomatic and consular missions, continues to be a key priority. We contribute to advancing the Government's inward investment programme and participate in policy development in this field. Total external trade for 2000 increased to a record £109 billion, of which exports accounted for £65 billion. Britain, the USA and continental Europe continue to be our major export markets.

The recent expansion of our diplomatic representation in Asia has enabled us to consolidate our export and investment support role in that region. Official figures for last year confirm that seven of Ireland's top 20 trading partners are in Asia.

Export earnings from the agri-food sector in 2000 amounted to £5.4 billion. Following the BSE and FMD crises, the task of maintaining and, where necessary and to the maximum extent possible, recovering market access for exports of such food products as beef, has become a major focus of our activity.

Ireland participated actively in the negotiations leading up to the adoption of the **United Nations Millennium Summit Declaration** in September 2000 and attaches high priority to its effective implementation. The centrepiece of the Taoiseach's address to the Summit was a commitment that Ireland would meet the UN's development cooperation target of 0.7% of GNP by the end of 2007, and would reach the level of 0.45% by the end of 2002.

Ireland's **election to non-permanent membership of the United Nations Security Council** for the 2001-2002 term on the first round against stiff competition was a major achievement. Since joining the Council in January, we have made a constructive and positive contribution across the range of issues including in relation to peace support operations in various parts of the world, regional conflicts and sanctions committees. Ireland's unique and distinctive UN experience in areas such as peacekeeping, disarmament, human rights and development cooperation has been very useful in determining positions there.

We have been particularly engaged in Africa since becoming a member of the Security Council: in this capacity Ireland is chairing the UN Angola (UNITA) Sanctions Committee. The Taoiseach made clear his commitment to Africa when he participated in the first EU-Africa Summit in Cairo in May 2000 and during his visit to South Africa in January 2000.

Ireland's role in **UN peacekeeping** continues to be an important signal of our commitment to the ideals of the organisation. Under the direction of the Government, Ireland has supported EU initiatives in the area of conflict prevention and played an active role in the development of both military and non-military aspects of EU security and defence policy, including civilian crisis management. Ireland's involvement in this area has been fully in accordance with Ireland's policy of military neutrality and in keeping with our traditional foreign policy values. On the same basis, our participation in Partnership for Peace has now begun.

In the area of disarmament, Ireland was a lead **co-sponsor of the New Agenda resolution** which was tabled in the First Committee of the United Nations General Assembly, last November. This resolution enshrined the unequivocal undertaking to accomplish the elimination of nuclear weapons given by the Nuclear Weapons States at the Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference. We are actively engaged in securing the universality and implementation of the Landmines Convention and examining restrictions on other inhumane weapons.

In the field of human rights, the establishment of the Human Rights Commission and the planned incorporation of the European Convention on Human Rights into Irish law are very significant developments. Ireland also ratified the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination in December 2000. Ireland played an active role in the 57th session of the UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva this year. Ireland sponsored a resolution on religious intolerance which was passed by consensus.

Ireland continues to contribute actively to the international effort involved in preparing **East Timor** for independence, through our ongoing contribution of Defence Forces personnel to the military component of UNTAET (UN Transitional Administration in East Timor), and through our programme of bilateral aid for the rehabilitation and construction of the country which is administered by our recently established office in the capital, Dili.

Ireland has pressed for a revitalisation of the international response to the HIV/AIDS crisis in both the EU & the UN. The Taoiseach led the Irish delegation to the **UN General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS** on 25-27 June 2001. On that occasion the Taoiseach formally announced an increase of US\$30m in Government funding for international AIDS projects.

In order to meet the **Aid target of 0.7%** by the end of 2007, we anticipate a four-fold increase in our aid expenditure, from £261 million in 2001 to over £800 million in 2007. Arising from the decision to increase aid expenditure to 0.7% of GNP by 2007, the Government ordered a full review of the aid programme so as to provide a reinvigorated policy basis for the expansion. The review committee held its first meeting in February and expects to complete its work and report to Government later in the year.

Relations between Ireland Aid (the Government's Programme of Development Co-operation) and NGOs continue to grow closer which is demonstrated by a growing budget for NGOs. At the same time, a programme of multi-annual funding for certain NGOs is nearing completion. Multi-Annual Funding will enable a more strategic approach to development, including planning monitoring and rigorous evaluation.

The official aid programme continues to place major emphasis on the promotion of human rights and democratisation throughout the developing world. As a clear reflection of this priority, the programme has, in recent years, taken the approach of explicitly integrating human rights, democratisation and governance activities into its programmes in the six priority countries and in South Africa.

At the Executive Board of the World Bank, Ireland has continued to press for a sustainable exit from the debt treadmill for the world's poorest and most heavily indebted countries. In 2001, we will allocate an additional £4.5m from Ireland Aid to the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Trust Fund at the Bank to help fund debt relief. This is in addition to the £11m Ireland has already committed to this Fund.

TAXATION AND ECONOMY

The Government's policies have ensured strong economic growth, expanded public services, reduced taxes and cut unemployment to less than half its previous level.

Employment has expanded rapidly, with the numbers at work growing by 80,000 in 2000 alone. At the end-June, the standardised unemployment rate was 3.6%, the **lowest rate of unemployment** since comparable records began in 1983.

This strong economic performance has enabled more rapid progress than planned on a number of the key objectives in the Programme for Government. The taxation and social inclusion commitments of Partnership 2000 were achieved in two years, a year earlier than expected with future developments, notably the introduction of a tax credit system, announced in Budget 1999. More importantly, the favourable economic conditions ensured successful qualifications for Economic and Monetary Union.

Our four Budgets so far have made significant progress in implementing the tax commitments contained in the Action Programme for the Millennium. Budget 1998 allocated £517 million on a full year basis to personal income tax / PRSI reductions. Budget 1999 allocated a further £580 million. Budget 2000 allocated over £1 billion to personal tax reductions and Budget 2001 allocated over £1.2 billion for personal tax reductions.

As a result of our tax, welfare and pay policies, all sections of society have seen a significant increase in after-tax income.

Our last three budgets in particular have introduced **major tax reform**. The introduction of standard rating of the personal and PAYE allowances in 1999 was the first step in a move towards a **full tax credit system**. Standard rating equalises the value of personal allowances for all tax payers, thereby increasing the equity of the tax system.

A number of other allowances, including the incapacitated child allowance and dependant relative allowance, have been doubled and standard rated as part of the move to tax credits. The result of which is to maintain the value of the allowance for top rate taxpayers and double the value of the allowance for standard rate taxpayers.

As a result of the changes we have introduced in the personal and PAYE over our period in office, the number of income earners outside the tax net stands at 668,000 or 38% of income earners. When we took office a single person on PAYE entered the tax net at just £71 a week, now no income tax is paid on incomes of less than £144 a week.

In Budget 2001, we continued the process of **widening the standard rate band**. The single band was widened by £3,000 to £20,000 and there was a consequential increase for double income earners. The married one earner band was increased from £28,000pa to £29,000pa. As a result of this band widening the proportion of income earners on the higher tax rate will fall to a record low of 23%.

To assist the low-paid, the income threshold for the Health Levy was increased and all employees earning between £217 and £280 per week benefited by up to £5.60 per week. A PRSI exemption of £11,750 was introduced for low-paid persons. Over 460,000 employees will gain from this additional measure. Over our four budgets, we have also taken 35,000 elderly persons out of the tax net.

At the last election, **we promised to cut taxes** and we have spectacularly delivered on this promise. Over four budgets we have reduced the standard rate of tax by 6%, from 26% when we took office to 20%. We have also reduced the higher rate of income tax by 6% from 48% to 42% over our four budgets. This contrasts starkly with the record of the previous Government. During their tenure in office, they merely reduced the Standard Rate of Income Tax by 1%.

The outcome of the **Berlin Summit** met our Action Programme's commitments regarding structural funds. In recognition of the regional imbalances that exist in Ireland, we sought to retain a significant part of the country as an **Objective One region**. The Berlin outcome confirmed that the regions of the Border, Midlands and the West will retain full Objective One status for the next round up to 2006. The rest of the country will be treated as an Objective One region in transition thereby guaranteeing funding on a gradually declining basis for all this region for six years of the new round of Structural Funds.

We launched the **National Development Plan 2000-2006** in November 1999 and it will lay the foundations for Ireland's continuing economic and social development. The scale of investment in the Plan is of unprecedented proportions. The Plan provides for a total public investment of £40.6 billion (1999 prices) of which £13.3 billion will be in the BMW Region and £27.3 billion will be in the S&E Region. About £4.7 billion will come from the EU, and £1.8 billion from Public Private Partnership sources. The vast bulk of the balance of about £34 billion will be funded by the Exchequer.

The vision of the National Development Plan is to ensure that Ireland will remain competitive in the global international market place and that the fruits of our economic success will be shared more equally at regional level and throughout society. It is the first multi-annual development plan which sets out a clear vision for building up both economic and social infrastructure and services in this country.

In order to ensure that the infrastructure programme of the National Development Plan is implemented within the Plan period, we established a Cabinet Committee, chaired by the Taoiseach, on Infrastructural Development, including **Public Private Partnership**. This Committee is supported by a high-level Cross-Departmental Team.

Following our adoption of a Public Private Partnerships approach, we have made considerable progress in establishing the policy platform for PPPs. The fruit of our labours include both a bill to provide a sound statutory basis for public authorities entering into PPP arrangements and also, agreement of a framework to assess the appropriateness of PPPs for infrastructure projects and to guide their implementation, taking into account the wider economic, social and environmental objectives provided for under the PPF.

The key considerations in adopting a PPP approach to projects are long-term value for money and their priority at national level. To date the procurement of two education sector projects, three major roads projects and several environmental services projects have reached an advanced stage.

In the National Development Plan 2000-2006, a minimum indicative target of £1.85 billion has been set for PPP investment, including £1 million in the roads sector, £300 million in public transport, £100 million in water supply and £450 million in solid waste. This does not reflect the total level of PPP activity under the Plan, since PPP investment in education infrastructure is also to be included in the Human Resources area.

In our Review of the Action Programme for the Millennium, we pledged to renew and sustain the **Social Partnership approach**, which has brought such huge gains since it was introduced in 1987. Delivering on this commitment, we successfully negotiated with the social partners a successor programme to Partnership 2000. The Programme for Prosperity and Fairness (PPF) includes pay agreements that will improve real living standards to the maximum extent without jeopardising competitiveness or the growth in jobs consistent with an increasing labour force. This year will see further considerable delivery on PPF commitments. Between measures taken to date and commitments given, considerably more than the £1.5 billion PPF undertaking for social inclusion has already been given.

There has been a welcome reduction in the rate of price increase as measured by the Consumer Price Index. The CPI decreased by 0.3% in July in comparison with a monthly increase of 0.3% in July of last year. The positive effects of the Government's actions in the Budget are reflected in the fact that inflation fell from 5.9% in December 2000 to 4.8% in July 2001. These reduced figures confirm the strategy on which Budget 2001 is based.

Our challenge is to manage the situation over the next few months so as to **minimise inflationary pressures** and to ensure the inflationary trend continues to move downwards while securing the full implementation of the PPF, including the objectives for enhanced living standards both for those at work and those dependent on social welfare payments.

We believe that the management of the situation requires co-operation of all sectors of the economy in order to preserve the social solidarity which has underpinned our dramatic economic success. In recent months, we have witnessed our exposure to trends in the global economy and in key sectors. In the face of such threats, we must retain the confidence, born of past successes, that we can overcome future challenges. We need, in particular, to avoid a return to leap-frogging pay claims and industrial action - official or unofficial - as the method of dealing with issues in dispute.

Fianna Fáil and the Progressive Democrats in Government are committed to a policy of **balanced regional development**. In the Review of our Action Programme, we pledged to channel public-sector jobs into provincial areas, particularly into towns other than the four main urban centres outside Dublin.

While it is the case that we had hoped the Government would have been in a position to take decisions in relation to the **decentralisation programme** earlier, this was simply not possible due to the scale of the proposed programme including, for example, issues relating to the identification of those who would relocate as well as the centres to which they would relocate.

We have received submissions from and representations or enquiries on behalf of urban centres throughout the country. It is only right and appropriate that due recognition be given to those who have gone to such lengths to articulate the merits of their respective towns. This consideration of the submissions and representations is, however, only one element which will contribute to informing the Government's ultimate decision. The Government has also invited the views of the civil service management and the civil and public service staff unions and is confident that these groups will bring to bear their considerable experience of decentralisation and contribute significantly to informing the decision making process.

We established a Cabinet sub-committee on Decentralisation, which includes the Taoiseach, the Tánaiste, the Minister for Finance and the Minister for the Environment & Local Government. This programme is the most ambitious in the history of the State and the Government is conscious of the difficulties ahead in ensuring its effective implementation. It is for this reason that we are undertaking such a thorough consultation process. We have invited the views of those most closely associated with it and we are confident that with their active assistance the **target of up to 10,000 decentralised jobs** can and will be achieved.

Our decision to establish the **National Pensions Reserve Fund** was based on a viewpoint that it is essential to take advantage of current favourable conditions to prepare the public finances to meet longer-term Exchequer liabilities. The purpose of the Fund is to build up assets which will part-finance the Exchequer costs of social welfare and public service pensions from 2025 onwards, when the State's pensions bill is expected to rise significantly with the progressive ageing of the population.

CRIME

When this Government entered office it set ambitious and challenging targets in the field of crime prevention and drug misuse in our society. Four years on, we have reason to be proud of the progress that has been made in these areas. Not only has this Government sought to combat crime but it has also sought to tackle the underlying problems which cause crime and allow violence to permeate our society.

Overall **crime has fallen by approximately one-quarter** over the past four years. This is an unprecedented achievement and is evidence that the Government's anti-crime measures are working. The overall number of serious crimes committed has fallen from approximately 103,000 in 1996 to about 78,000 in 2000. The rise in detection rate and fall in crime are the result of a number of factors including increased funding and resourcing of An Garda Síochána.

Since entering office **the strength of the Gardaí has increased** consistently starting from a base line of 10,800. The number of Garda has now increased to 11,656 and is on target to reach the planned strength of 12,000 by the year 2002. The Garda Vote has been increased from £472 million in 1997 to £693 million for the year 2001. This increase in funding will allow the Gardaí to more effectively police our streets and neighbourhoods.

As part of our effort to cut crime further still, a total of £12 million is to be allocated towards the installation of CCTV systems nationwide over the next three years - as part of the **Garda CCTV expansion programme** - with £4 million being allocated in 2001. It is also planned to introduce a grant scheme to cater for those communities who would like to press ahead on their own with a local CCTV system.

In the National Development Programme, a provision of £87 million is made for an **integrated programme for combating crime** by addressing social inclusion through employment which is to be delivered by the Prisons Service, the Probation and Welfare Service and the Garda Síochána.

Alongside providing increased resources, this administration has been active in introducing and enacting innovative anti-criminal legislation. Among the more significant pieces of legislation passed into law as part of the Government's strategy to deal with crime are the **Sex Offenders Act, 2001**, and the Children Act, 2001.

The Sex Offenders Act, 2001, introduces a new notification procedure or tracking system for all convicted sex offenders, as well as a new requirement for sex offenders when seeking employment where unsupervised access to children is involved. Meanwhile, the **Children's Act, 2001** provides the statutory framework for the development of a new juvenile justice system. This Act updates and reforms the law and takes a realistic but humane approach to juveniles who get involved in anti-social and criminal activities.

Since the last progress report was published the Criminal Justice (Theft and Fraud Offences) Bill, 2000, has been published. When enacted it will provide a comprehensive code to deal with crimes such as theft, forgery and counterfeiting.

A new comprehensive **Charter for the Victims of Crime** has been implemented and is in place. The Charter includes, in respect of various agencies and bodies which comprise the criminal justice system, details of the standards of service and the levels of information and support which victims can expect and are entitled to.

The Government has also been extremely active in the **fight against drug misuse and drug related crime** which has become the scourge of many modern European cities. Part of this fight against drug crime has involved the introduction of hard hitting legislation such as the Criminal Justice Act, 1999. However the Government has also focused on implementing initiatives at local level to prevent drug crime and misuse.

Garda operations have resulted in significant drug seizures with an estimated street value of almost £134 million between 1998 and 2000. Garda operations such as Dóchas and Cleanstreet continue to prove effective in targeting on-street drug dealing.

The Criminal Assets Bureau has frozen assets to the value of £15 million under the Proceeds of Crime Act, demanded in excess of £37 million in tax payments and saved almost £1.6 million in social welfare payments.

Our 1997 Programme for Government listed as one of its key priorities, the creation of a **Drugs Court System** which would involve court supervised treatment programmes for less serious drug related offences. Following the Reports of the Working Group on a Courts Commission and an expert Drug Court Planning Committee, the Pilot Drug Court Programme was launched in January this year. This pilot programme marks a major policy initiative in the criminal justice system and is designed as an alternative measure for dealing with less serious and non-violent drug offenders.

We are aware that any long term anti-crime policy must engage local communities in co-operation with the Garda Síochána. In this regard, a National Crime Forum was established in 1998. The State's **first ever National Crime Council** has also been established to continue this open and innovative approach to crime policy development.

As part of our work on crime, we have put a new emphasis on understanding the causes and impact of crime. A new system for recording crime and studies on the impact of crime have been developed.

The Government has always operated on the basis that there is a correlation between crime and social deprivation and that the drugs problem can not be solved by law enforcement measures alone. The Department, An Garda Síochána and the Probation and Welfare Service have enthusiastically supported and been actively involved, along with other statutory agencies and the community and voluntary sector, in the National Drugs Strategy Team and the Local Drugs Task Force. In addition, the Gardaí have been provided with funding for preventative **Youth Diversion Projects**, which have increased in number from 12 to 51.

We have brought about a 100% increase in funding for the **Probation and Welfare Service** from £12.5 million in 1997 to over £25 million in 2001. In association with the Probation and Welfare Service, approval has now been sanctioned for 21 new community based crime prevention projects. A Parole Board is in the process of being established.

We are also delivering on our commitment regarding **prison places**. Under the prison building programme, an unprecedented £30 million Capital Investment Programme is underway. Under the current phase an additional 1,207 places have been provided to date. Work on completing a further 700 spaces is underway. This has put an end to the "revolving door" syndrome as it is known. As a direct result of the prison-building programme, all provisions of the Bail Act, 1997, have now been implemented.

In addition, the Government has decided to sanction a further major prison development to provide approximately 240 closed prison places for male adults to accommodate anticipated custodial needs and to end overcrowding in Dublin prisons, including Mountjoy which is to revert to single cell occupancy in the wake of extensive renovations currently being planned.

EQUALITY

This Government has introduced wide ranging equality legislation which will ensure that minorities and those previously disenfranchised from society receive the full protection of the law.

The **Employment Equality Act, 1998**, is now in force and prohibits discrimination in the area of employment on nine grounds - gender, marital status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, race and membership of the Travelling community.

The **Equal Status Act, 2000**, came into effect last October and protects against discrimination outside the field of employment. The Act applies to any goods and services which are available to the public whether payment is involved or not, and irrespective of whether the service is provided by the public sector or private sector.

Both the **Equality Authority** and the Office of the Director of Equality Investigations are now empowered to carry out the full range of their mandated functions under the Employment Equality Act, 1998, and Equal Status Act, 2000, in relation to direct and indirect discrimination in the employment and non-employment spheres.

The Government Action Programme is committed to improving maternity legislation. Following a review of the **maternity protection legislation** in 2000, the Government increased the period of maternity leave which attracts a payment from 14 weeks to 18 weeks and unpaid maternity leave from 4 weeks to 8 weeks. We have also increased the periods of adoptive leave.

As a government, we recognise that the provision of **quality affordable childcare** in itself ensures parents can avail of equality of opportunity and take up positions in employment, training and education. It can also assist children to get the best possible start for life. We highlighted childcare as a priority area for investment in the National Development Plan which has provided £250 million for the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme. In addition, £94 million in Exchequer only funding has been allocated.

The **National Disability Authority** is now operating as a research and standards body for disability services and an advisory body for disability policy and practice. It marks a dramatic shift in the State's approach to providing services to people with disabilities.

The Government remains committed to introducing a **Disabilities Bill**, as a positive action measure to advance and underpin the participation of people with disabilities in society. Work on the preparation of the Bill is underway and the Heads of the Bill are expected later this year.

One of the grounds specifically mentioned in both the Employment Equality Act and the Equal Status Bill is membership of the Travelling community. Initiatives have also been introduced to improve relationships between Travellers and the settled community. The **Traveller Communications Strategy** is in its final year of its three year programme. The objective of the programme, entitled Citizen Traveller, is to promote a greater understanding between Travellers and the settled community and to address the underlying causes of mistrust between both communities. Official funding of £300,000 is again being provided during 2001.

IMMIGRATION AND ASYLUM

This Government has consistently stated that it is committed to providing protection to refugees and the application of fair procedures in accordance with law. With this in mind we have introduced a number of legislative measures to ensure that **immigration and asylum policies** develop within a fair and effective framework.

The Illegal Immigrants (Trafficking) Act, 2000, which came into force last year includes provision that any person who organises or knowingly facilitates the entry into the State of a person they know to be an illegal immigrant will be guilty of an offence punishable on conviction on indictment to an unlimited fine or up to 10 years in prison or both. The Act was necessary to address the well documented role of organised criminal elements in trafficking illegal immigrants across borders in Europe.

Work has progressed on the development of an immigration and residence bill which will put in its place a comprehensive and modern legislative code covering the full range of the law on immigration and residence in the State. Meanwhile, the **Immigration (Carriers Liability) Bill** which makes it an offence for carriers to bring improperly documented non-nationals into the State is currently being drafted and will be introduced in the near future.

In May 2000, the Government completed a **Readmission Agreement** with the Government of Romania, the country which generates the majority of asylum seekers in the jurisdiction. The text of similar agreements were recently agreed with Nigeria and Bulgaria and it is hoped to sign these shortly.

The Government has also carried out a number of administrative measures in regard to this area. The Government decided last March that a statutory agency, to be called the **Reception and Integration Agency**, should be under the aegis of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform. The agency is operating on a non-statutory basis pending the enactment of legislation and has responsibility for co-ordinating the provision of services to asylum seekers and refugees, and implementing integration policy for all refugees and persons who, though not refugees, are granted leave to remain.

Furthermore, in May 2000, the Government approved the establishment of a **Garda National Immigration Bureau** which is being led by a Detective Chief Superintendent and has been assigned national functions in relation to combating trafficking in illegal immigrants. Moreover, Garda international liaison arrangements have been strengthened by the placing of Garda Liaison Officers in London and Paris with particular reference to combating trafficking activity.

Central to the Government's asylum strategy is a full commitment to meet our obligations under the **1951 Geneva Convention** both by identifying and protecting persons in need of protection and by more quickly dealing with those applications for asylum which are clearly unfounded and do not satisfy the protection criteria set out in the Convention and in national law.

With this in mind, the Government is working towards a comprehensive asylum strategy which is aimed at greatly increasing processing capacity and will lead to the completion of the processing of all new asylum applications within a six month period.

In an attempt to accelerate the asylum process, the Government has agreed the allocation of substantial **additional resources including 370 additional staff** and new accommodation for the asylum and immigration areas to speed up processing of asylum applications. A large element of these staff are now in place and the recruitment of the balance is well under way.

Alongside these legislative and administrative measures, we have also introduced a number of initiatives aimed at ensuring the integration of refugees into society and combating racism. The Equality legislation discussed earlier is relevant to this area, as is the establishment of the **National Consultative Committee on Racism** and Interculturalism. The remit of the Committee is to provide an ongoing structure to develop programmes and actions aimed at developing an integrated approach against racism and to advise Government on matters relating to racism and interculturalism. In October 2000, the Government decided to implement a national anti-racism public awareness programme. A core budget of £4.5 million was allocated to the programme over a three-year period.

HEALTH & CHILDREN

This Government has a clear aim to provide **healthcare of the highest quality**, which is **accessible to all of our citizens** without undue delay or inconvenience. Over the past four years real advances have been made in health and personal social services. The wide range of initiatives launched by this Government, such as the National Children's Strategy, the Cardiovascular Strategy and the National Health Promotion Strategy, the report of the Medical Manpower Forum and the National Drugs Strategy together with the incremental changes in programmes of care, in areas such as services for people with intellectual disability, physical disability and for older people, are all contributing to the ongoing strengthening and reform of the health services.

These advances have come about as a result of this Government's planned and strategic approach to the health services coupled with the most significant programme of investment in healthcare ever taken. Overall, **we have increased health spending by 100%** since we took office. In the last year of the Rainbow administration our health services received £2.5 billion. This year we allocated over £5 billion in health funding.

Since coming to office four years ago this Government's health policy has been based on three key elements - firstly, a substantial increase in the resources allocated to health; secondly, proper planning of the use of these resources; and, thirdly, a partnership approach to the resolution of problems - with the interests of the patient the overriding consideration. More than anything, this Government is committed to putting the patient first.

A total of £2 billion has been provided under the National Development Plan for **capital investment** by Health Boards /Authorities in the health service. This unprecedented continued investment will ensure that major hospital developments and a range of initiatives in the non-acute hospital infrastructure will be developed on a planned and strategic basis.

All programmes will benefit from the additional capital investment including services for the intellectually disabled and the mental health programme. Structures are in place at local level to ensure implementation of the Plan.

Not only is the Government spending more money but we are determined that the taxpayer and patient receives value for money. In line with our commitments, we have undertaken a **Value for Money Audit** of the health system.

The Value for Money report, which will underpin funding for service improvements, makes specific recommendations about infrastructural deficits and the need for capital investment, including IT for service and delivery and Management Information. These recommendations also deal with health boards structures and organisational changes relating to information needs and the evaluation of health services. This comprehensive report will play a crucial role in informing the forthcoming health strategy.

As part of our commitment to bring a health service of the highest quality to all, without delay or inconvenience, this Government is **reducing waiting lists**. Funding of £34.5 million has been made available in 2001 under the waiting list initiative. The number of people on waiting lists at 31st December 2000 was 27, 857. This represents a drop of 25% on the figure for December 1999.

Furthermore, a significant decrease has also taken place in a number of target specialities since December 1999. The number of people waiting for cardiac surgery dropped by 55% and the number waiting for Gynaecology services dropped by 46%. Large reductions have also been achieved in the areas of Orthopaedics, Ophthalmology, E.N.T. and Urology. Progress in implementing the recommendations of the Review Group on the Waiting List Initiative is being monitored with agencies.

Substantial progress has been made in implementing the recommendations of the **Commission on Nursing** since its report was published in September, 1998. The First Annual Report of the Monitoring Committee overseeing the implementation of the recommendations was circulated earlier this year. As proof of our commitment to the implementation of the report, the Government has provided funding of £22 million for initiatives under the priority action over 2000 and 2001.

An extra 300 student nurse training places were created last year. There was a highly successful outcome to the 2000 competition with a number of schools of nursing oversubscribed. Funding totalling £765,000 was made available for marketing campaigns. This year for the first time ever, the application system for places on the Nursing Registration/Diploma Programme is being handled by the CAO. The number of applications for nursing is up 21% on last year, including a 24% increase in the number of mature applicants.

A major new recruitment and retention initiative, costing in excess of £5 million has also been announced. In particular, a new scheme of flexible working arrangements for nurses and midwives in the public health service came into operation in February, 2001. As part of the overall recruitment and retention strategy, nurses and midwives wishing to undertake nursing and certain other degree courses on a part-time basis are now reaping the benefit of a new fees initiative introduced. In return for a commitment to continue working in the public health service for a period, they will have their fees paid by their employers.

The Expert Group's **report on health professionals** has been implemented, resulting in enhanced pay and career structures for the professions involved. Improved payments and conditions have been negotiated with junior doctors. These include significant improvement in overtime rates, enhanced training opportunities and relocation expenses.

In addition, there is to be more structured management of the hours worked by non-consultant hospital doctors with the aim of ending long periods of continuous duty. A National Task Force is to prepare a detailed implementation programme on reducing NCHD working hours and to quantify the resources implications and costs arising.

This Government is fully committed to the implementation of the **National Cancer Strategy**. Since 1997, the Department of Health and Children has allocated £60 million to this end, including almost £19 million this year. Our aim is to reduce the rates of death from cancer and to ensure that those who develop cancer receive the most effective care and treatment and that their quality of life is enhanced to the greatest degree possible.

No anti-cancer strategy would be complete without strong action against tobacco. We are determined to **reduce tobacco addiction**. The Government has raised the age at which tobacco products can be sold to young persons from the present age of sixteen to eighteen years. We have also raised the maximum fine on persons convicted of selling tobacco products to underage persons from £500 to £2,000.

The Office of Tobacco Control has been established to monitor and co-ordinate the implementation of the plan of action proposed by The Tobacco Free Policy Group. The Office of Tobacco Control will be statutorily established in a new Public Health (Tobacco) Bill which was recently published. We intend to use enabling powers under section 46 of the Bill to extend environmental controls on smoking to a range of public areas and public facilities not already covered by existing legislation and regulation, including pubs.

There has been substantial progress in implementing our Cardiovascular Health Strategy aimed at **reducing heart disease**. It tackles in a comprehensive fashion one of the main killers facing Irish society today. The strategy is being implemented over a five year period in a planned and structured manner. Priorities have been identified at national level, including through consultation processes.

Plans are now being finalised to implement the First Phase of the Programme for Structured Secondary Prevention of Cardiovascular Disease in General Practice. Some GPs in each health board will be involved, providing preventative care to patients who have had a heart attack or other serious coronary artery condition, including bypass surgery.

Phase One of the **National Cervical Screening Programme** commenced in the Mid Western Health Board area last October. Under this phase, in the region of 67,000 women in the 25-60 age group will be screened free-of-charge at minimum intervals of five years.

The **National Health Promotion Strategy** for the years 2000 to 2005 was launched last year and complements existing strategies such as Building Healthier Hearts and the Cancer Strategy. The purpose of this new health promotion strategy is to set out a broad policy framework within which action can be carried out at an appropriate level to advance the strategic aims and objectives.

The Strategy aims to promote a holistic approach to health in Ireland by focusing on a link between health promotion and the major determinants of health such as social, economic and environmental factors and lifestyle behaviours.

This Government has substantially improved mental health and autistic services. A sum of £18.64 million has been provided this year for further improvements. Priority is being given to the further development of community based mental health services, the further expansion of specialist services for children and older people as well as the implementation of the recommendations of the **Task Force on Suicide**.

The new **Mental Health Act** provides for the establishment of an independent agency to be known as the Mental Health Commission. Its primary functions will be to ensure that the interests of persons who are detained involuntarily are protected and to promote and foster high standards and good practice in the delivery of all mental health services.

In our Action Programme we pledged to review medical card eligibility. In the Budget 2001 package, we extended the **eligibility for medical cards** to all people over 70 years of age regardless of means or hardship. In addition, the whole area of eligibility is currently under consideration in the context of the new National Health Strategy.

The National Advisory Committee on **Palliative Care Services** has prepared a report containing recommendations on a comprehensive national policy for the strategic planning and development of palliative care services. Approximately, £12.4 million in development funding has been provided for palliative care since 1997, including £2.625 million in 2001.

This Government supports the establishment of a heart and lung transplant facility. We have put in place an agreement with the Freeman Hospital in Newcastle to treat patients pending the establishment of the Irish based programme. Training of Irish staff is also to be undertaken at this hospital. Key personnel have now been appointed to the programme including a transplant surgeon and a physician.

An extra £2.3 million is being provided this year for services relating to violence against women. This supplements £6 million already being spent by the health boards in support of the Rape Crisis Centre, Women's Refuges and other agencies providing services for women victims of violence.

This Government is proud of our record in relation to children. We have established a **Social Services Inspectorate** and this will play a central role in the ongoing monitoring of child protection standards. We are also implementing the approach to the protection and welfare of children set out in the Children First document. Additional funding of £3.1 million has been allocated to health boards for implementation this year.

A **National Children's Strategy** has also been launched. The Strategy is a 10 year plan and includes a range of action across such areas as eliminating child poverty, ensuring children have access to play and recreation facilities and giving children a voice so that their views are considered in decisions that affect them. The National Children's Office has been established to co-ordinate and monitor progress on the implementation of the Strategy.

We have increased the **nursing home subvention**. The revised rates now stand at £90, £120 and £150 depending on whether the level of dependency is medium, high or maximum. Additional funding has been provided to the nursing home subvention scheme in 2001, bringing the total to £52 million for the year.

We have made significant investment in the development of care services for **people with disabilities**. Between 1997 and 2000, over 1200 new residential and nearly 1700 new day places were provided for persons with an intellectual disability and those with autism. Additional capital funding of £20 million is to be made available over three years to support the development of services to people with physical and sensory disabilities.

The Government is currently preparing a **new Health Strategy** which will set out a vision for a well-resourced, efficiently run, patient-centred and **world-class health service**. As part of this work, we have put in place the **most far-reaching consultation process ever** used in the health area to ensure that everyone's voice is heard. The results of the consultation process will be published and will help inform the contents and approach of the Strategy.

We believe that the new Strategy can set the way forward for a positive programme of growth, development, modernisation and change in the health system. It will set the way forward for addressing the challenges facing us, and **build upon the progress this Government has already made**.

We are focusing on the **key themes of equity, quality, accountability and people centredness** so that we can achieve a health system that is truly responsive to people's needs. The new National Health Strategy is also being informed by a number of recent studies such as the **bed capacity review** and the value for money audit. This will ensure that our efforts are targeted where the need is greatest. We are committed to putting those who use our health services at the heart of everything we do.

DRUGS & URBAN REGENERATION

We have focused unprecedented official attention on working to break inter-generational cycles of disadvantage, particularly in areas where there is a heroin problem.

Through the **Young People's Facilities and Services Fund (YPFSF)** we have provided £46 million to develop youth facilities and services in areas where there is a significant drugs problem. The objective of the Fund is to attract "at risk" young people in disadvantaged areas into these facilities and divert them away from the dangers of substance misuse. This has been allied to funding for the **Local Drugs Task Forces** which involve effective partnerships to plan and develop targeted interventions.

Treatment facilities for heroin users have been dramatically increased and independent evaluations of the programme have shown major progress being achieved.

We are providing **nationwide rehabilitation services for drug addicts**. Rehabilitation and aftercare are one part of a continuum of services which are available in all health boards to address the problem of drug misuse. The Eastern Regional Health Authority area, where the majority of opiate misusers reside, will continue with the development of rehabilitation services during 2001. It has developed a blueprint for rehabilitation in 2000 which aims to align treatment services with a rehabilitation focus, with a co-ordinated response for all agencies centred on the individual needs of each client.

A review of the National Drugs Strategy was completed prior to the summer and launched on 10th May, 2001. The **National Drugs Strategy 2001-2008** sets out a series of objectives and key performance indicators under the four pillars of supply reduction, prevention, treatment and research.

The review of the National Drugs Strategy identified Local Drugs Task Forces as an important element of the overall response to the drug problem - it is proposed to extend the task force model to other parts of the country, through the establishment of **Regional Drugs Task Forces**.

Through the Area Based Partnerships, we are supporting the development and empowerment of marginalised communities throughout the country. In Dublin, the **Ballymun Regeneration programme** will ensure a new beginning for the area. The EU URBAN II Programme for Ireland will deliver £8.5 million to Ballyfermot over a six year period. A multi-annual programme of renewal for local authority housing has been put in place. This provides for the complete replacement of a series of the worst major flat complexes.

The **Integrated Services Process (ISP)**, which operated in a number of communities in Dublin and Cork has established a radical new way of coordinating and delivering state services. An independent evaluation found that this, in turn, has resulted in real and tangible benefits for the communities concerned and a significant improvement in the services provided by State agencies.

A number of national education drug awareness initiatives have been implemented and an extensive support programme for primary schools has been introduced.

The National Development Plan includes £420 million for local development initiatives targeted at disadvantaged communities, drugs and young people at risk. Earlier this year, the Government launched the **RAPID Programme targeting the 25 most deprived urban neighbourhoods in the State** for special treatment involving the front-loading of State investment for facilities and services. The Programme will identify the obvious needs and problems of the 25 areas and will draw upon funds provided under the NDP to resolve these problems and needs, as a priority. This will bring about a huge improvement in the standards of living of the residents in these areas over the next three years.

BUILDING AN INCLUSIVE SOCIETY

Social inclusion is a priority for this Government and one of the main yardsticks to measure our success is on how much change we have effected in improving the quality of life of those suffering from social exclusion.

Our aim is to ensure that all citizens share in the new found prosperity of our nation. We are striving to ensure that our new found wealth is applied **to secure equal rights and equal opportunities for everybody** and we are resolved to tackling those deep seated social problems which those who governed Ireland in the past did not have the means to address.

Our stated objective is **to build an inclusive society** where all citizens have the opportunity and the incentive to participate fully in the social and economic life of the country. After four years we can point to numerous notable successes in promoting an inclusive society. Most significantly, **the National Anti-Poverty Strategy** (NAPS) goals, with an original target of 2007 have now been achieved. Research shows a very significant decline in the number of Irish people experiencing deprivation.

Substantial progress has been made over the past four years in implementing the key social inclusion commitments in both the Action Programme for the Millennium published in 1997 and the revised Programme agreed in November 1999.

The Action Programme for the Millennium attaches importance to maintaining the position of the family in Ireland as “one of our strongest national characteristics”. In the first year of our term of office, we published the findings of the **Commission on the Family**. The report is making a positive contribution to developing coherent, progressive and effective policies for families.

In line with the Commission’s recommendations, we have established a Family Affairs Unit in the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs and provided significant extra funding to the **Family Mediation Service** and to Marriage and Child Counselling and Family and Community Centres.

In our Revised Programme, we promised to establish the Family Mediation Service on a statutory basis and develop a strong regional network of accessible counselling services. The Government plans to establish - under legislation of a new Agency - the Family Support and Mediation Service which will provide a comprehensive and coherent response for families who have needs of support services. Some £12 million has been provided in the National Development Plan for the development of family services projects.

Further evidence of our commitment to the family include the new widowed parent grant of £1,000 introduced in 1999 for widowed persons with children, to assist them in the immediate aftermath of the loss of a spouse; a five-fold increase of **the Bereavement Grant** from £100 to £500 to help alleviate the cost of funerals, the first increase since 1982; an extra 4 weeks entitlement to Maternity and Adoptive Measures and pro-active measures to encourage lone parents to return to the workforce.

We have worked hard to adopt the right framework to achieve lower rates of unemployment. Unemployment has been reduced to one of the lowest levels in the EU. We have placed a much greater emphasis than any other government in the history of the State on **employment supports** which currently account for some 24% of total unemployment/employment spending. The scale of these developments is indicated by the fact that in 1992 only 1% of such spending went on “active” measures to help people back to work.

We have increased the number of places on the Back to Work Scheme to 39,000 and added a further year for the self-employed. The **Family Income Supplement** is now being paid on a net income basis to some 12,000 families and the Back to Education programme for the unemployed and people with disabilities is now benefiting more than 5,000 people.

One of the key priorities in our Revised Programme is to bring forward a programme to effectively address child poverty. Over the past four budgets, we have provided substantial improvements in the rates of **Child Benefit** and intend to continue to do so in line with our commitments in the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness with a priority focus towards £100 per month for the third and subsequent children.

In addition, we are committed to exceeding this by dramatically increasing Child Benefit by £1 billion over the 3 years of the programme. Following this year's historic increases in Budget 2001, the level of Child Benefit has more than doubled from £30 per month for the first two children to £67.50 this year.

In our Action Programme we are also strongly committed to improving the position of people who take time out of the paid workforce to care for children or sick relatives. This year we increased the Qualified Adult Allowance for those over 66 years of age by £15 per week which represents a first step in bringing this payment up to the full old age pension rate over a number of Budgets.

As a government, we have made determined efforts to break cycles of poverty and deprivation and significantly the main National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) goals. In light of this achievement, and in view of the rapid economic and social progress achieved, we have taken the opportunity to set more ambitious new targets as part of our Social Inclusion Strategy. These include consistent poverty to be reduced to below 5% by 2004 and we are well on our way to achieving this target.

Additionally, under the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness, we have committed ourselves to revising and renewing the National Anti-Poverty Strategy in consultation with the Social Partners. We are also working closely with other EU Members States in developing national approaches to combating poverty and social exclusion on a community wide basis.

We have recognised the need to deal decisively with the issue of welfare income adequacy. The present economic growth has to be carefully managed so a situation does not develop where those in employment prosper, while those dependent on social welfare are left to languish.

Significant improvements in social welfare schemes amounting to almost £1.8 billion have been made over the past 4 years. Social welfare rates have improved significantly in real terms since we took office over 4 years ago and payment dates for budgetary increases in rates have been brought forward each year with the aim of paying them at the start of the tax year in January 2002.

As part of the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness, we have entered into a number of social inclusion commitments with the social partners. The Partnership Agreement sets out our commitment that in the period up to 2003, all rates of social welfare will be increased in real terms and substantial progress will be made towards a target of £100 per week for the lower rates of payments. These, together with the further improvements to which we are committed over the coming years, demonstrate our guarantee that everyone will share in the benefits of social and economic developments.

A Working Group has been established under the Programme to examine the issues in relation to benchmarking and indexation of social welfare payments and will report shortly.

We have delivered on a major commitment in introducing the **first ever National Minimum Wage** which is set at the highest level in Europe and has raised the income of thousands of disadvantaged households. The National Minimum Wage Act came into effect on 1st April 2000 and the national minimum hourly rate of pay is set to increase to £5 on 1st October next year.

We are well on line to deliver on the commitment included in our revised Action Programme to achieving a minimum rate of £100 per week for all **social welfare old age pensioners** by 2002 to ensure that all old age pensions are increased in line with average industrial earnings.

The effect of the increases we have introduced is that **the rate of old age contributory pension** (£106 per week) currently **exceeds the £100 target** and the rate of the old age (non-contributory) pension now stands at £95.50 per week. In addition, the widow/er's (contributory) pension for people over age 66 years has been increased by £12.90 this year to £102 per week as a first step in aligning the rate with the rate of old age (contributory) pension.

In our election commitments in June 1997, we also promised to address the issue of people who narrowly failed to qualify for a pension – essentially self-employed persons who were aged 56 or over when Social Insurance was extended to the self-employed in April 1988 and who therefore could not satisfy the condition of having entered insurance at least 10 years before pension age. In 1999, we introduced a special old age (contributory) pension for those of them who had paid at least 5 years contributions since 6 April 1988.

Last year, we introduced similar pensions for people who had pre-1953 insurance but failed to qualify for pensions or only qualified for a minimum pension because their 1953 contributions were not fully recognised. We also made radical changes to the means test whereby the initial £10,000 of capital is now completely disregarded and amounts over £10,000 are assessed on a sliding scale.

With a view to further recognising the value and esteem this Government has for all older people in our community and in our society, we have extended the eligibility for medical cards to all people over 70 years of age regardless of their income and household composition.

Since we took office in mid-1997, this Government has provided a total of £19.5 million for the **Scheme of Community Grants for Older People** which is designed to support initiatives to improve the security and social support for vulnerable older people. An important aspect of this scheme is that it is community driven and any voluntary organisation or group working with or providing support for the elderly may apply.

This Government fully recognises **the valuable role of carers in our society**. No other Government has been as committed to supporting carers as this Government. We have delivered on a wider range of increases both in terms of income supports and in terms of services provided. In particular, we have delivered on our commitment to relax the criteria for Carers Allowance and to increase the value of the payment in real terms.

This is reflected in the increasing numbers of carers in receipt of the Carers Allowance and Carers Benefit, which have increased by 88% since we took up office, from 9,200 to 17,300 and will rise again to 22,000 approximately by the end of this year. Expenditure has more than tripled from £36.5 million in 1997 to a projected £113.8 million this year.

Among the key improvements introduced over the past four years are: carers of children now qualify for carer's allowance, new respite care payment, residence and full-time care rules relaxed and the extension of the free schemes. Last year, we introduced a radical and innovative Carers Benefit scheme payable for up to 15 months to enable carers to give up work temporarily to care full-time, while still retaining their employment rights.

This Government is committed to ensuring that people with disabilities have full rights, opportunities and benefits. As one of a series of measures to include services for those with disabilities in the mainstream, a new organisation, Comhairle, was established in June 2000 to combine the National Social Services Board (NSSB) with certain functions of the National Rehabilitation Board (NRB). Comhairle supports the provision of independent information, advice and advocacy services for everybody, including those with disabilities.

Responsibility for vocational training and employment programmes/supports for people with disabilities has been transferred from the National Rehabilitation Board to FÁS, as part of our commitment to improve services through mainstreaming, where appropriate. We also established a new Supported Employment programme which complements existing employment-related support.

EDUCATION

This Government has put in place the largest concentrated programme to modernise, expand and make more inclusive education in the history of the State.

A key goal is **to ensure that all school buildings meet modern standards**. Increased funding over the past three years has enabled major progress in improving the quality of educational buildings. However, the scale of under-investment in school accommodation over the years has been so great that many Irish schools do not meet modern standards. Accordingly, there is a compelling case for continued high levels of investment in the modernisation of school buildings and the National Development Plan allocates more than £800 million for primary and post-primary buildings.

The **Schools Information Technology Programme** has made a major impact in schools and brought the information age into the classrooms. This is one of the largest initiatives of its type in the world and there are now almost 60,000 multimedia computers in Irish schools, up from 16,000 in early 1998. As a result of the Schools IT2000, the average Irish second-level school now has 42.7 computers, more than 95% of schools are using the internet (up from only 25% in early 1998) and well over 37,000 teachers have attended one or more IT training courses.

Additional funding of £81 million over a three year period, 2001-2003, has been made available. A review and evaluation of the progress made to date across all aspects of Schools IT 2000 is being undertaken with a view to deciding how best to allocate resources in the future.

One of the key objectives of the next phase is to support a greatly expanded programme which will ensure that the ratio of computers to pupils will be reduced significantly further still. It is also intended that our teachers will have the most comprehensive on-going training programme in the world available to them and that Ireland will use technology to implement the most advanced curriculum support programme of any country.

As a government, we are determined to identify and address skills needs. One of our major achievements has been the establishment of the **Education Technology Investment Fund** with unprecedented exchequer support. This has helped to address severe capacity constraints at third level and to develop new areas of activities in third-level institutions where emerging skills needs have already been identified.

In response to the report of the Expert Group on Future Skills, the Government created 5,400 third-level places in the engineering and computer hardware and software areas. As a result of the Expert Group's second report, a phased intake of additional students in the chemical and biological sciences commenced in the 2000/01 academic year. The Group's Third Report has identified the need for a substantial increase in the output of doctorates, particularly in science, engineering and technology and identifies a growing need to attract suitably qualified researchers from abroad to work in Ireland.

For the first time ever, specific funding for research and development in third-level institutions is being provided through the Department of Education and Science. Our Programme for Research in Third Level Institutions, is playing a central role in keeping Ireland at the cutting edge of international developments.

The main objectives of the Programme are to promote the development of high quality research capabilities in third-level institutions, so as to enhance the quality and relevance of graduate output and skills, and to enable a strategic and planned approach by third-level institutions to the long-term development of their research capabilities. The total amount

committed to the Programme for Research by the Government in the period 1999-2001 amounts to £220 million.

Furthermore, the National Development Plan allocates £1.9 billion to Research, Technological Development and Innovation, of which £550 million is allocated specifically to the education sector. We will also continue to support research and development through enhancing the research capacity of institutions via the Science and Technology Fund and through continued close co-operation with industry concerning their needs for graduates.

We have also ensured the vibrancy of work outside of the sciences by establishing the **Irish Research Council for Humanities and Social Sciences**. The Council has been provided with funding to develop the first ever state supports for advanced research at all levels.

Earlier this year, we announced the establishment of the new Irish Research Council for Science, Engineering and Technology. The new Council will establish schemes of support for researchers in science, engineering and technology. It will complement the existing Council for Humanities and Social Sciences and other structures already in place.

This Government has reversed its predecessor's neglect of primary education and provided the **largest ever increase in direct funding for primary schools**. We have brought about an increase of almost 58% in the standard capitation rate (currently £71) since the Government took office. We have also **cut Pupil : Teacher ratios to the lowest level** in our history and, having already **more than doubled teacher training places**, we are pledged to ensure that teacher support problems do not recur. The increased provision of primary teacher training places, including in the graduate training programme (conversion course), will ensure that supply of primary teachers is addressed.

We have ensured a substantial increase in funding for in-career development in recent years. A comprehensive review of the **In-Career Development Programme** is being carried out to assist individual teachers to access high-quality courses of their choice and is due to report shortly. A Commission reviewing the operation and effects of the points system presented its final report and recommendations following significant public input. The Higher Education Authority is pursuing these recommendations with the institutions and will soon report back with a view to further progress.

We recently successfully passed legislation to establish a **Teaching Council**, the functions of which will be to set and promote the highest professional standards for first and second-level teachers and to regulate the professional affairs of teachers. The Act is the culmination of extensive efforts, spanning over three decades, and will enhance further the status of teaching as a profession.

A revised primary curriculum was launched in September, 1999. It represents the **first significant revision of the Primary Curriculum in almost thirty years** and was developed through an extensive process of review and consultation. The focus in the revised curriculum is on the child as a learner and it recognises that there are many effective approaches to learning which can be utilised within the classroom. High standards of achievement in literacy and numeracy are central to the curriculum.

We are in the process of implementing a comprehensive reform and resourcing package for **promoting Science in schools**. At second level a major initiative is underway to increase the take-up of Physics and Chemistry at Leaving Certificate level, including the provision of capital grants, development of curricula and examinations and in-career development of teachers.

No Government can match our record of consistent investment and development of new policies to address **educational disadvantage**. In particular, a new and innovative initiative for Educational Opportunity launched by the Taoiseach in December 1999 is tackling educational disadvantage at all levels across the system with resources being targeted at those most in need. Thinly spread and broad-based interventions will be avoided. The

elimination of educational disadvantage will continue to be a core objective at all levels from pre-school through to third level. This initiative represents a comprehensive approach to combating educational disadvantage and involves £194 million of additional funding over three years (2000-2002) for action at all levels.

Earlier this year, as part of this process, we introduced a new targeted support package for disadvantaged primary schools. This programme, Giving Children an Even Break, involves the provision of a range of additional supports to over 2,300 primary schools at a cost of £26 million over 3 years and the creation of over 200 additional teaching posts.

We have continued to provide funding for a series of initiatives, including the **Early School Leavers Initiative** and the **Stay in School Initiative**, to identify and help children aged 8-15 who are at risk of dropping out of school and getting caught in cycles of disadvantage. We have sought to deal with the issue of non-attendance at school by addressing the underlying problems which give rise to it. Our Education (Welfare) Act involves a radical overhaul of the school attendance legislation and is helping to ensure a nationally co-ordinated approach to **school attendance**. Examination fees for all families who hold a medical card have also been abolished.

In one of our first decisions, the Government approved a major expansion in places on the very effective **Youthreach and Traveller Training courses**, which are targeted at early-school leavers aged 15-18. Counselling, guidance and childcare services have been introduced for these programmes.

In a significant development, we published a White Paper which sets out a comprehensive strategy for the development of the **early childhood education** for children aged from birth to six years. Action is proposed on a wide range of issues including the promotion of quality of provision, measures to facilitate and encourage parental involvement in their children's early education and the development of a system of inspection to determine whether quality standards are being met.

With a view to implementation, we have sought and received proposals from third-level institutions for a pilot project to develop early childhood education provision in pursuance of the objectives in the White Paper. Discussions with the institutions concerned are now well advanced.

We have rightly identified the necessity of addressing **adult education** as a means of combating long term unemployment. Without basic literacy skills, people are not in a position to get a job or access training programmes. Our White Paper sets out a comprehensive strategy for the future development of the sector, covering a major expansion of learning options and a national adult literacy programme. A range of developments is underway or in planning for which funding has been secured. These include the National Adult Literacy Survey, the Back to Education initiative, the development of an adult education guidance service and an expansion in community education. In total, the Adult Literacy Budget has increased massively from less than £0.85 million in 1997 to £10.677 million this year.

We are ensuring the number of places in higher education continues to expand and we will ensure that Ireland achieves a position near the top of OECD countries in terms of **higher education participation**. We have ensured that the planning of appropriate provision of further and higher education places is subject to regular review. Our planned investment in education research under the National Development Plan 2000-2006 will lead to increased opportunities for postgraduate research in this country. Following the publication of a Study Group report, the Higher Education Authority has been asked to benchmark our performance vis-à-vis the top quarter of OECD countries on an ongoing basis, monitor developments in other countries and recommend any necessary adjustments to the level of third-level provision.

We have extended the **remedial teacher service** to all primary schools with effect from September 1999 and the Home/School Community Liaison Service to all primary schools with disadvantaged status. In line with the expansion of the remedial service, the first ever national initiative to improve reading standards was launched. A comprehensive drug awareness programme for schools has also been set up.

This Government is committed to providing a comprehensive educational and training service to everyone with special needs in this country wherever they live. In October 1998, we launched a major initiative in **special education** which provided the first ever automatic support service for children with disabilities in the primary system and has resulted in an increase in the number of resource teachers in the system from 104 to more than 950 and an increase in the number of special needs assistants in the system from 299 to more than 2000. We also introduced an escort service on all special school transport services carrying children to and from special schools and special classes attached to ordinary schools.

This August we announced a range of enhanced and new measures for the education of people with special needs and disabilities. Taken together, the forthcoming Disabilities (Education and Training) Bill, a Special Needs Education Forum, additional psychologists sanctioned for the National Educational Psychological Service, a Group on second level education for all children with special needs and the accelerated establishment of the National Council for Special Education are a significant and substantive move by this Government to meet the needs of people with disabilities.

The Disabilities (Education and Training) Bill will introduce enhanced measures for people with special needs and co-ordinate all special education facilities across all departments. This Bill will draw together all of those various programmes to copperfasten them and guarantee their delivery to those whose need is greatest in our society. The Bill will also include a number of new programmes as well as enhancements for existing ones which, together, will respond to the developing needs of people with disabilities.

The Government has also given approval to establish a **Special Needs Education Forum**. This Forum will provide a valuable mechanism for groups, organisations and individuals to contribute to the elements which will make up the State's comprehensive response to the needs of people with disabilities. The proceedings of the Forum will help to inform the drafting of the new Disabilities (Education and Training) Bill.

We also intend to accelerate access to services for those people with special needs. Within the next 12 months, we will enable the appointment of an additional 70 psychologists which will upgrade the psychological assessment services to the level which will remove the bottlenecks and open up access to special services to all those who need them.

Delivering on our Action Programme commitments, we have already established the National Education Psychological Service Agency which was intended to expand to provide a comprehensive nationwide service by 2004; that goal - from 48 psychologists in the Service in 1999 to 200 in total - will now be achieved before the end of next year. As a consequence, waiting time for psychological assessment will be greatly alleviated within twelve months.

In the meantime, we have approved funding to employ the services of educational psychologists from the private sector to alleviate the bottlenecks. We have also established a Group of senior officers within the Department of Education and Science on the provision of second level education for all children with special needs.

The Group is tasked to investigate and to examine existing second level services to determine whether they meet the needs of those for whom they are intended and to make recommendations for improvements and enhancements where appropriate.

The Government also recently approved the establishment of an independent and autonomous National Council for Special Education. The Council would be responsible for the provision of research, expert advice and certain operational functions in the delivery of special education services for students with disabilities.

We have been responsible for putting in place a number of significant reforms and developments in the education sector. In particular, a whole new level of openness and transparency has been introduced to education including, for example, allowing students to see their marked Leaving Certificate papers.

The Education Act has put much of Irish education on a sound statutory foundation for the first time. The last Government's plans for £40 million regional quangos have been replaced by proposals which have been widely welcomed. These provide a statutory basis for school diversity and a framework of both rights and responsibilities for all partners in education.

We have ensured that parents are playing an increasingly important role, nationally, in the development of education policy and, locally, in its implementation. The Education Act strengthens parents' position within the education system by, for example, providing a statutory basis for their role on boards of management and by providing a channel for appeals by students and their parents.

The principle of academic autonomy has been respected in dealing with institutions. The passing of the Qualifications Act paves the way for some institutions to award their own qualifications within a national framework and will ensure that quality and access inform all elements of further and higher education activity in this country.

ENVIRONMENT AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

In the four years since the electorate voted this Government into office, we have worked tirelessly to honour the promises we made on the Environment and Local Government front. A wide range of innovative policy initiatives, many fully delivering on commitments, others representing important foundations for ensuring full delivery over the lifetime of this Government have now been introduced.

Our main guiding principles have been modernisation, reform and strategic planning, all key ingredients in the recipe to provide Ireland with an efficient economy and high quality environment well into the 3rd millennium.

This Government recognises that our environment is our greatest natural asset and that it is incumbent on all of us to safeguard it so that we secure the well-being of present and future generations. In An Action Programme for the Millennium, we placed sustainable development very clearly at the heart of our environment programme.

In a report arising from the first ever Environmental Performance Review of Ireland, published in November 2000, the OECD endorsed the good overall quality of the environment in Ireland. In doing so, it emphasised the benefits to be gained from better integration of economic and environmental policy. As a government, we intend to utilise the report's conclusions and recommendations in ongoing policy development.

We are committed to ensuring that concern for the environment is central to all Government policy decisions. Across our agenda in government, we have sought to foster good environmental behaviour among individuals, communities and business. Because of the importance of the environment to everyone, we launched a major National Environmental Awareness Campaign to encourage a culture of environmentally sustainable choice in everyday life.

The new structures we have put in place to help us deliver sustainable development, in partnership with all involved stakeholders, are making a real contribution towards participate policy making. **Comhar, the National Sustainable Development Partnership**, the establishment of which was promised in the Action Programme for the Millennium, is now an active participant in environment policy development.

In addition, the **Environmental Network of Government Departments** continues to provide a focus for environmental integration across Government policies, and is overseeing the pilot phase of policy eco-audit, a cornerstone of the environmental commitments in our Action Programme.

We can all be proud of our continuing record economic growth. It is our view that the downside, in terms of damage to our environment and depletion of our natural resources, can only be avoided by resolute measures to step up environmental protection and make our development more eco-efficient.

Successfully addressing **water pollution** remains one of our biggest environmental challenges. We have put in place an intensive and multi-faceted drive to improve water quality; this includes extension of catchment management to all waters, the phase-out of phosphorus based detergents, and the promotion of nutrient management planning, resulting in artificial phosphorous fertiliser usage dropping by 25%.

We have also ensured that the development of our **water/waste water infrastructure** is moving ahead at a rapid pace. Last year alone, a record £335 million was invested in meeting the continuing increase in demand for services. A new three year Investment Programme for 2000-2002 is providing for investment of £2.1 billion on 529 water and sewerage schemes.

This Government believes that addressing climate change successfully is the critical test of national and global commitment to sustainable development. Following substantial public consultation and inputs to our draft Climate Change Strategy by Comhar and the Environmental Network of Government Departments, and endorsement of the overall approach in the PPF, we approved and published a **National Climate Strategy**. The Strategy sets out a range of cross sectoral and sector specific measures to ensure that Ireland meets its Kyoto target.

We have taken a wide range of steps to tackle the national scandal of litter. Some successes are now evident, and we will continue our drive to step up local authority enforcement of the **Litter Pollution Act**, as well as promoting more responsible public behaviour. In this regard, we launched the Litter Action Plan as a national anti-litter strategy with particular emphasis on broadly based local partnerships as a basis for combating litter. We also doubled the litter on-the-spot fine to £50 from January 2000 and the fine will increase to £100 next year.

Air quality protection is being enhanced through the extension of the bituminous coal ban. This Government is also responsible for the phase out of leaded petrol sales, another important bonus in terms of air quality. Following extensive consultation and public debate, we have adopted a positive but precautionary approach on the release of GMOs to the environment, based on scientific risk assessment and management.

In line with our **radical waste management policy**, Changing Our Ways, local authorities are delivering regional, integrated, waste management strategies, building on the internationally accepted waste management hierarchy, which we recognised in An Action Programme for the Millennium. With continuing waste growth and poor management infrastructure, good solutions are everyone's responsibility.

The targeted £650 million investment in waste management under the National Development Plan includes a substantial emphasis on Public Private Partnerships which will harness the knowledge and expertise of the private sector to develop high quality facilities under EPA environmental licensing controls.

Provisions in relation to waste, prevention and reduction are central to our **Waste Management (Amendment) Act, 2001**, which we successfully steered through the Oireachtas prior to the summer recess. The Act includes provisions to introduce a levy on plastic bags and a landfill levy.

Prior to the formation of this Government, **reform of Local Government** was one of the most talked about, yet least delivered, policies of modern times. In the original Action Programme for the Millennium we set ourselves an ambitious agenda for reform of the local government system and for restoring real decision-making power to local authorities and local people. We are delivering on this agenda in a very tangible way, and we have developed and expanded the programme beyond what was envisaged and in response to emerging circumstances.

Our reform programme would, of course, be hollow, unless the necessary resources are put in place to deliver on our ambitious plans for local government. The new **Local Government Fund** is now providing the vehicle for delivering significant additional resources for local government – this year the Fund will amount to about £720 million, which is 63% more than was available in 1997.

With additional resources being provided to Local Government, it is crucially important that the objectives of efficiency and value for money are met. In line with commitments given in the Action Programme for the Millennium, we have established a number of initiatives in this area, particularly in terms of modernising the local authority information and accounting systems so that they are equipped to support the efficiency and value for money agendas.

In recognition of the role of Local Government in Irish life we put proposals before the people to give constitutional recognition to our Local Government system, proposals which received a resounding ratification from the electorate. Comprehensive legislation to underpin the programme of local government renewal was published in May this year. The **Local Government Act, 2001**, includes provisions for the **direct election of mayors/chairs and a comprehensive new ethics framework for councillors and local authority staff**.

A key element of our reform programme is the bringing about of greater coherence in the delivery of state agency and local development services at local level, with a lead role for local government. This will be achieved through the newly established County/City Development Boards (CDBs) which are representative of local government, local development bodies, State agencies operating locally and the social partners.

This Government has shown a clear commitment to **investing in our physical infrastructure** in order to underpin our future economic growth. Increasing investment in the national road network has been a priority since we came into office. Overall investment in the **national road network** has increased from £232 million in 1997 to £620 million in 2001, up an incredible 170% in our four years in office.

This investment will be intensified under the NDP which provides for an investment of £4.4 billion in the development of the national road network up to 2006. The investment programme will focus in particular on the completion of major inter-urban routes to motorway/dual carriageway standard, completion of the M50 and Dublin Port Tunnel, and on major improvements to other national primary routes.

As a government, we recognise the importance of investment in non-national roads, particularly in sustaining the fabric of rural life and helping to combat rural depopulation. This year, investment in **non-national roads** hit a new record with a total exchequer funding of £319 million, representing a massive increase of 82% in investment since we entered into government. In addition, local authorities will invest over £100 million from their own resources which means that the total spend on non-national roads this year will be well over £400 million.

Building on the commitments in our Action Programme, ambitious targets have been included in the NDP for securing private finance in relation to roads, water services and waste management projects. Pilot projects are being advanced in all sectors. In the roads sector, projects have been approved which are estimated to involve in excess of £700 million in private finance out of an overall NDP target for private finance investment in roads projects of £1 billion.

A spin-off from our record economic progress has been the very significant increase in the numbers of cars on our roads. The unfortunate side effect of this has been increased **traffic congestion** in our major urban centres, particularly in Dublin. A comprehensive, up to date, integrated strategy for responding to the transportation needs in the Greater Dublin Area was put in place last October in the form of the Dublin Transportation Office policy document 'A Platform for Change.' The strategy includes provision for Metro, LUAS, DART/Suburban Rail, bus and roads for the period to 2016, at an estimated cost of £14.2 billion.

As well as the additional investment in transport networks in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA), we have also addressed the issue of institutional arrangements for transport and land use planning in the Greater Dublin Area. Reform proposals, involving the establishment of a new Transport and Land Use Authority for the GDA, have been published and work is already underway on preparing the necessary legislation.

While traffic congestion is, of course, not confined to Dublin, many of the other affected centres are feeling the benefit of investment in their road networks. Most notably, the ring around Cork City has been completed with the opening of the Lee Tunnel. Land use and transportation studies are underway or soon to be underway, in Limerick, Cork and Waterford. A study has been completed in Galway. Following its successful introduction last year, regional traffic management grants are being made available again this year and approximately £1.75 million has been allocated for regional traffic management measures in Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford.

This Government is the first in years to take direct action to facilitate a more urgent and accelerated approach to matching **taxi supply and demand**. In the Review of our Action Programme, we made a commitment to improve the Dublin taxi service. As a result, we have introduced new regulations which placed no restrictions on the numbers of new taxi and wheelchair accessible taxi licences which could be granted by local authorities. Since the introduction of the new licensing regime, the Dublin taxi fleet has more than doubled and increases in taxi numbers are taking place in the rest of the country, with obvious service benefits to the general public.

Deaths and injuries on Irish roads have tragically marked families the length and breadth of this country. The numbers are staggering – 415 deaths last year – and remain a cause of serious concern. In response to this situation, we launched in 1998, the **first ever Government-led Road Safety Strategy** to be prepared in this country. The principal objective of which is to reduce road deaths and serious injuries by at least 20% by 2002. The implementation of the measures in the strategy is already bearing fruit with data for 2000 indicating that road deaths were down by 12.1% and serious injuries were down by 24.8% on 1997.

Arising from a commitment given in the Road Safety Strategy, we have published legislation to underpin the introduction of a penalty points system. It is our intention that the **Road Traffic Bill** will be enacted in time to allow the penalty points system to be introduced early next year at which stage the necessary IT systems to support the operation of the penalty points systems should also be in place.

HOUSING

The extent of the sustained economic growth over recent years has had a serious unwelcome side effect in the form of significant increases in the price of houses, a particular problem for first time buyers. Unlike our predecessors who seemed to have no interest in the housing situation, never before has a Government devoted so much attention, energy and resources to housing issues. Right across the spectrum of housing tenures, we have taken comprehensive, radical and innovative steps to ensure improved access by all income groups to housing accommodation suitable to their needs.

A wide range of measures have been taken over the last four years to curb the rate of house price increases. These include **supply-boosting measures** such as the Serviced Land Initiative, higher residential densities and a new local authority affordable housing scheme, as well as demand-dampening measures such as the withdrawal of certain investor incentives and higher rates of stamp duty for investors.

The impact of the measures we have taken is clear. Housing output in 2000 reached a **record level of almost 50,000 units**, up close to 50% since 1996, the last full year of the previous government. In spite of continuing high demand, the effects of increased output are reflected in moderating house price trends since annual house price inflation peaked in 1998 at levels of over 40% in some cases. By comparison, the average rate of annual new house price increases last year had fallen to 13.9% with the rate of increase in second-hand prices at 16.7%. This represents very real progress which we are determined to build on over the balance of our term.

The funding devoted to the social and affordable housing area has been increased enormously by this Government. An unprecedented £6.9 billion is being devoted to **social and affordable housing measures** over the period to 2006, the implementation of which will be supported by the radical provisions of the Planning and Development Act under which local authorities will be able to acquire up to 20% of zoned residential land at existing use value.

A new 4-year **multi-annual local authority housing programme** was introduced last year. 25,000 local authority houses will be built under this programme during the period 2000-2003, with 41,500 being built over the period of the NDP. Over 3,200 houses were completed last year and at year-end a further 5,000 houses were under construction, the highest level of work in progress since 1985.

The wider range of social housing measures have also benefited from the Government's unprecedented attention to housing issues. The funding for the Disabled Person's Grant, the Essential Repairs Grant, the Special Housing Aid for the Elderly, the Shared Ownership Scheme and the Mortgage Allowance have all been significantly improved and a significantly greater role is envisaged for the voluntary sector.

As a government, we recognise the important role fulfilled by the **Private Rented Residential Sector** and we committed ourselves to its continued development in the reviewed Action Programme for the Millennium. Wide ranging proposals for major reforms have been announced in response to the Commission on the Private Rented Sector's report. The necessary legislation is being prepared and a new Private Rented Residential Tenancies Board will be established on an ad-hoc basis in advance of the legislation.

In terms of supporting the development of this sector, we have also introduced incentives to encourage the provision of rented accommodation for students and incentives are also available in certain urban renewal areas. Various tax incentives to support the provision of private rented accommodation have been put in place, including a new "rent-a-room" scheme introduced in our last Budget.

The need to urgently address the problem of homelessness was highlighted in the Action Programme for the Millennium and the **Integrated Strategy on Homelessness** was launched last year. The action plan for the Dublin area has now been completed and a Homeless Agency has been established to oversee the delivery of the plan and to co-ordinate the delivery of services to homeless people in the Dublin area. The plans for Cork and Limerick have also recently been finalised.

Substantial funding has been made available to ensure that the strategy is implemented. As part of the Strategy, capital spending on suitable accommodation is being doubled to £40 million for the period 2001-2006.

We have also put in place a strong legislative base to support the provision of accommodation for the travelling community under the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act, 1998. In accordance with the requirements of the Act, all local authorities have now adopted their 5-year accommodation programmes. The necessary financial resources to implement these programmes will be provided.

In the Action Programme for the Millennium, the Government committed itself to a comprehensive review of the planning system. The **Planning and Development Act, 2000**, which is being brought into operation on a phased basis, marks the culmination of this process and is the most significant piece of planning legislation for nearly 40 years.

The Act introduced a sustainable development philosophy to the Irish planning system and contains many significant changes and initiatives designed to increase the efficiency of the system and to ensure a strategic approach to land-use planning in Ireland. It also includes the very significant provisions in relation to housing referred to earlier under which local authorities can acquire up to 20% of residential land at reasonable prices for the provision of social and affordable housing.

With a view to increasing the timelines of decision making in the planning process, we have increased the membership of **An Bord Pleanála** and very significant additional staffing and financial resources have been provided. At local authority level, the increased funding which is now being made available under the new local government funding arrangements are enabling local authorities to devote additional resources to their planning and development control functions.

Delivering on our commitment to employ **more professional planners** in the local authority service, an additional 72 planning posts were approved during 1999 and a further 50 such posts were approved last year. Further steps are now being taken to expand the capacity numbers of the planning profession so that the planning system can continue to show efficiency and effective gains.

Substantial progress has been made on the preparation of the **National Spatial Strategy**. We see this strategy as being of crucial importance in translating the Government's policy on more balanced regional development into a detailed framework for spatial development throughout the entire country over the next 20 years.

In order to restore the built fabric of Ireland's smaller towns, we launched a new **Town Renewal Scheme** aimed at enhancing their attractiveness as places in which to live, work and do business. Some 100 towns have been designated under the scheme which runs until 2003. A tax incentive based scheme of urban renewal benefiting 49 cities and towns has also been introduced and will run until the end of 2002.

ENTERPRISE, TRADE AND EMPLOYMENT

In four years, we have succeeded in translating economic growth and competitiveness into exceptional job growth. Since June 1997, there are an **extra 310,000 persons at work**, the numbers attracted to the labour force increased by one sixth or an additional 220,000 persons and the number of unemployed has fallen by more than half to 65,000.

There are now 1.78 million people at work in the country, unemployment has fallen to 3.6% based on the Quarterly National Household Survey measure and **long-term unemployment is at 1.2%**. The main enterprise support agencies also continue to report substantial job creation gains.

The **Employment Action Plan 2001** sets out the strategies, policies and actions being implemented consistent with maintaining strong economic and employment growth and building on our achievements to date. The twin strategy adopted is to provide supports and mobilise labour supply from all available sources and to provide the necessary education, training and lifelong learning opportunities to ensure that supply matches demand and that employed persons and those seeking employment have the required skills.

The FÁS Employment Service has been substantially expanded to underpin the delivery of the Employment Action Plan preventative strategy aimed at stopping the drift into long-term unemployment. The **Local Employment Service** has been extended. New operational arrangements for the management, development and delivery of a National Employment Service have been agreed. These include the assimilation of the LES under FAS with a new National Employment Services Advisory Committee.

A new **National Training Fund** has been established. This will provide a new resource base for training of people for, and in, employment. In the context of adaptation to continuing labour market change, we established last year a Task Force on Lifelong Learning which is now preparing its report.

We launched the **Social Economy Programme** in September 2000 to ensure the provision of social and community-related services, particularly among disadvantaged communities and crucially to provide new employment opportunities.

Our view as a Government is that Ireland's industrial base needs to continue to develop to match our overall economic progress. As a nation, we need more innovative firms operating in dynamic, high growth sectors. And, we need our established firms to constantly pursue new sources of competitive advantage.

Our international competitiveness position is kept under continual review by the **National Competitiveness Council**, which issues both annual reports and specific recommendations on what is needed to improve our competitiveness. Ireland is ranked seventh in this year's World Competitiveness Report.

Enterprise Ireland (EI), the new streamlined agency to replace Forbairt, the Irish Trade Board and part of FAS has been established. EI's mission is to work in partnership with client companies to develop a sustainable competitive advantage, leading to a significant increase in profitable sales, exports and employment.

In line with commitments made in our Review of the Action Programme for the Millennium, new structures for **Company Law Enforcement** and regulation of the financial services sector have advanced significantly. A new Single Regulator for the financial services sector, with a strong consumer protection mandate, is due to be in place early next year. The legislation to establish the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement is currently under consideration by the Oireachtas. Upon the enactment, the Director will be responsible for the investigation of suspected breaches of the Companies Acts, and the enforcement of the Companies Acts generally.

The Company Law Review Group has also been set up with effect from February 2000 to develop proposals for the review and reform of company law. A project to consolidate company law is also underway.

Despite predictions of a slow-down in the economy, applications for work permits continue to increase. In response to experience gained over the last year and to obvious abuses which have come to light, a number of changes have recently been introduced to the work permit system, the intended effect of which is to give greater emphasis to employee rights and the requirements of Irish Labour law in this area.

The establishment of a **comprehensive work permits regime** on a transparent legislative basis and the streamlining of procedures, adapted to respond to changing circumstances and emerging issues, is being progressed. Eligible asylum seekers no longer require a work permit to take up employment here.

Implementation of legislation in the Labour law area has progressed significantly under our stewardship. The Industrial Relations (Amendment) Act, 2001 - the purpose of which is to give effect to the Report of the High Level Group on Trade Union Recognition - came into operation on 31st May this year. The Protection of Employees (Part-Time Work) Bill, 2000, which transposes the provisions of the EU Directive on Part-Time Work has been published and is expected to be enacted later this year. The purpose of the Part-Time Work Directive is to prevent part-time workers from being treated less favourably than full-time workers.

Our Carer's Leave Act was passed prior to the summer recess and is designed to protect by law the employment rights of the carer over the period of his/her leave. The provision of Carer's Leave, together with the introduction of the new Carer's Benefit Scheme which we included in the Social Welfare Act, 2000, will help to facilitate and support employees who wish to leave the workforce temporarily to care for a parent or relative.

In recognition of the driving role we have given Research, Technological Development and Innovation (RTDI) in economic development, a massive £1.9 billion is provided in the National Development Plan 2000-2006 for RTDI activities across all government departments and agencies - £1.2 billion of which was earmarked for RTDI for industrial development related activities. This money will be used as a means of enhancing innovation and competitiveness, and in order to increase output and employment. This will be achieved through focused support for in-company R&D, the networking of companies with the wider Science and Technology infrastructure, the better use of technology in balanced regional development and the preparation for future technological opportunities through the vehicle of the Science Foundation Ireland.

The Technology Foresight Fund was established to support world-class research in niche areas of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT's) and Biotechnology. Science Foundation Ireland was set up to manage this Fund. The Foundation will operate by issuing calls for proposals in selected niches of ICT/Biotechnology and awarding research grants to the most competitive applicants who must be world-class researchers.

Initiatives to make Ireland 'Telework friendly' and show itself as a leader in the implementation of teleworking are underway. An **eWork Action Forum** has been established whose purpose is to provide a focal point for the ongoing development of the environment which will stimulate teleworking employment opportunities and ensure that this method of working achieves its full potential in contributing to economic growth and an improved quality of life.

The positioning of Ireland as a global leader in electronic commerce and as a key player in **next generation Internet Technology** is being progressed. A high-calibre international, national and corporate electronic commerce infrastructure and information architecture is being put in place.

The Global Crossing Service became operational in August, 2000 - this connectivity has been a major spur to the development of Ireland as an e-Business hub. The decisions by companies such as IBM, Microsoft, Dell and others to place significant e-Business activities here were only possible because of this initiative. In addition, the development of critically important Internet Data-Centres capacity here was a direct result of the provision of abundant and competitively priced state-of-the-art optical networks.

A substantial level of co-operation with our Northern counterparts in developing the North/South Digital Corridor has taken place.

Enterprise Ireland's E-Business initiative aims to promote an awareness and understanding of the significance and business implications of e-commerce and e-business, as well as assisting clients in developing an appropriate Internet strategy and presence. Enterprise Ireland has also established a £10 million e-business fund to boost the number of Irish companies transacting business across electronic networks.

The Government has pursued actively the promotion of competition throughout the economy. Action has been taken to strengthen the Competition Authority and the enforcement of competition law and to remove restraints on competition. A new **Competition Bill** is being prepared to strengthen existing legislation along the lines recommended by the Competition and Mergers Review Group. Arising from the recent OECD Report on Regulatory Reform, the Government is committed to pursuing further reforms in the regulatory area.

A programme of reform of intellectual property law is underway.

The **Copyright and Related Rights Act, 2000**, effects a comprehensive reform of Irish copyright law and brings Ireland into full compliance with its international and EU obligations in the area of copyright and related rights.

As a government, we view the achievement of balanced regional development as a major objective. Enterprise Ireland has allocated specific resources to pursue the issue of regional economic development. Efforts are being made to ensure that a significant number of Irish owned new fast track enterprises will be based in the regions. Also, existing Dublin-based companies wishing to expand to or locate additional facilities in regional locations are being facilitated.

In February of this year, we launched Enterprise Ireland's Regional Strategy. This strategy, entitled "Driving Growth in Regional Enterprise" involves improving infrastructure in the regions, delivering more high potential start-ups in the regions and encouraging Dublin-based companies and businesses which are considering expansions, to think about regional locations.

The need for more balanced regional development has now become the main focus of IDA Ireland's activity. The Agency has recently established Regional Economic Centres at three key locations (Waterford, Athlone and Sligo) while also continuing with the target of doubling the number of jobs from greenfield projects in the Objective One regions. An attractive financial package will be made available to any appropriate project which may choose to locate or expand in the regions.

Elsewhere, in the Transition Region, the industrial development agencies are directing their efforts at ensuring a greater regional balance in new development outside the major centers. IDA Ireland has opened new regional offices in Cavan and Limerick and is putting a greater focus on marketing of the regions. The new **IDA Ireland strategy** aims to bring a better mix of industry sectors and higher value industries to locations around the country, in particular, to locations that have not seen the emergence of the more modern industries.

We have also reached favourable agreement with the European Commission on the progressive introduction of a **standard rate of Corporation Tax of 12.5%**. This agreement is of major significance insofar as it serves to end any uncertainty regarding the fiscal element of the investment climate in Ireland for the foreseeable future and so should prove to be a key element in enterprise development and economic policy in the coming years. The 1999 Finance Act sets out the schedule of corporation tax reductions designed to achieve a single rate of 12.5% on trading income by 1st January, 2003.

AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

This Government has placed Irish agriculture and food in the prime position it deserves and our record is a proud one. Over the past four years this Government has made substantial progress on a broad number of areas to better position the internal and external demands which fall on it. We have not only achieved substantial gains for Irish agriculture and food through the **Agenda 2000 Agreement**, and marketing, but we are actively shaping policy to ensure the industry becomes a truly dynamic sector capable of meeting the challenging future that lies ahead. We have specifically targeted schemes to attract new entrants to farming, to encourage more efficient and environmentally friendly farming systems and to further develop the food sector and enhance its marketing capability.

One of the central aims of this Government is to enhance the production and marketing capabilities of Agriculture and Food and thereby strengthen the **long-term competitiveness** of what is our most important natural resources based industry. As a government, we are equally committed to maintaining the greatest number of family farms and to ensuring that agriculture remains the backbone of a vibrant rural economy.

Central to these objectives are the needs of full-time active farmers to further develop and for smaller farmers to have the choice and opportunity to supplement their household income through **off-farm employment**.

Having come through a difficult period, farm incomes improved considerably last year. According to ESRI research, farm households now have a substantially lower risk of poverty than urban and non-farm rural households.

Direct payments to farmers, which amounted to almost £1,033 million in 2000, accounted for 56% of aggregate farm income. In addition, around half of farm household income now comes from off-farm sources. On 45% of farms, either the holder or spouse has an off-farm job.

The **Farm Assist Scheme** introduced in 1999, in recognition of the problems facing low-income farm households, has since been improved and enhanced by expanding the eligibility conditions to allow for a more generous assessment of income. Over 8,000 families are benefiting from payments under the scheme.

A major achievement of this Government was securing a firm framework for the future development of agriculture - an achievement not matched previously. The National Development Plan gave substance to the commitments in the **Rural Development White Paper**. It contains a huge commitment to public investment - £6.7 billion over seven years - in actions that will impact directly on rural areas and a specific commitment of £4.8 billion allotted to agriculture, food and rural development.

The CAP Rural Development Plan approved in September 2000 will account for the bulk of this public expenditure with significant extra funding for REPS, and the **Early Retirement Scheme** as well as the new area-based Compensatory Allowance in Disadvantaged Areas and on-farm investment measures which are now all operational.

Another key priority of this Government is to facilitate the development of viable farm holdings through the encouragement of land mobility and early inheritance and directing quota rights to those most likely to use them effectively. In the allocation of additional milk quota, negotiated under Agenda 2000, small/medium producers are receiving priority.

We are delivering on our commitment to support the reorientation of our agricultural and food research, training and advisory services in line with **Teagasc 2000** to meet the new needs of our processors and commercial and part-time farmers. Teagasc has been allocated a fund of £25 million to recruit new scientists, invest in new facilities and to enable it participate effectively in the £560 million Foresight Fund. A further £10 million is provided for capital investment in education and facilities for agricultural colleges over the next five years.

A central policy consideration across all government departments is to place major emphasis on protection of the environment. In the agriculture sector, this is being encouraged by way of the reintroduction of the on-farm investment scheme and the pollution related special tax incentives and also by the continued promotion of the **REPS Scheme**, which encourages environmentally friendly farming practices. REPS participation is expected to increase from 45,000 to 70,000 farmers by 2006, approximately half the farmers in Ireland.

As a government, we are determined to develop a vibrant food sector. We have ensured continued attention to, and investment in process development, in product innovation and in marketing. Over our period in office, food exports increased from £4.7 billion to an estimated £5.4 billion. A welcome feature has been the particularly strong growth in value added products. Despite adverse trading conditions in the latter part of 2000, **beef exports** amounted to an estimated 495,000 tonnes worth £1.1 billion.

The National Development Plan contains particular provisions, with funding of £282 million, which are targeted at the **food industry**. These take account of the recommendations of the Food Industry Development Group and the Agri-Food 2010 Committee and emphasise competitiveness and market-orientation. The roll out of the food provisions of the NDP will take further account of these priorities.

It is vital that we ensure the absolute integrity of food is non-negotiable and remains central to future policy, both for the protection of Irish consumers and the development of overseas markets. This is underlined by the establishment of a fully independent Food Safety Authority, the landmark **National Beef Assurance Act** and the implementation of a range of inspection programmes at the primary processing level to enhance food safety.

Foot and Mouth galvanised the nation into extraordinary action on a single issue with one goal in sight. Our response was swift and effective and demonstrated the crucial role played by access to information in the battle to contain the disease. The national effort was underpinned by support from all sectors of the community including farmers and great numbers of the general public with little or no direct involvement with farming or rural areas. The latter group made a major contribution to the efforts to prevent the spread of FMD and made real sacrifices in the interest of protecting farming livelihoods.

The crisis is not totally over and we cannot become complacent in our attitude to it, but thanks to a great effort by all, we have been successful so far. What can be said at this stage is that the agriculture sector and the Irish economy has just come through the most difficult period for many decades, but, like all big challenges, not only can we beat them, we can grow significantly from the experience.

Our vision for the future of Irish agriculture is shaped by the prospects of major challenges in the marketplace and by changes in EU policy driven by enlargement, EU budget pressures and the outcome of the next round of world trade negotiations. The negotiations on the reform of the CAP under Agenda 2000 represented a major success against the odds. As a result, Irish farmers will benefit to the tune of **£10 billion over the period 2000-2006** in direct and other payments. In the Review of our Action Programme, we pledged to defend vigorously the Agenda 2000 Agreement in the WTO and, in particular, export refunds and direct payments to farmers. We are also determined to safeguard Irish interests in the EU budget review, due in 2002/3, which has the potential to trigger further reform of CAP. EU enlargement has also budget implications for CAP.

We aim to ensure that the future of rural Ireland is a prosperous and vibrant one. Following consultations with interested representative organisations, the government published a Plan of Action in response to the **Agri-Food 2010 Report**. The Plan sets out over 200 actions to be taken by state agencies and others on a comprehensive range of issues to address the future challenges that the farming and food processing sectors will have to face over the next decade.

MARINE AND NATURAL RESOURCES

This Government has a strong record in enhancing the economy and social well being of peripheral regions and we have delivered substantial and innovative policies and investments to our coastal communities, as part of this policy.

The Government has committed £171 million in the National Development Plan (NDP) 2000-2006 to the development of Ireland's **seafood industry**. This will support total investment of some £320 million in the sector over the lifetime of the NDP.

Our fleet renewal programmes will see investment in our fishing fleet of some £165 million. This is the largest investment in the fleet since the foundation of the State. Already under the £80 million **whitefish fleet renewal programme**, 33 new vessels and 11 modern second-hand vessels have been introduced, and some 250 existing vessels have been modernised. It is expected up to 30 more new vessels and 20 second-hand vessels will be introduced and over 300 more vessels modernised under the second programme.

In addition, the Government has introduced a new initiative to support innovation and sustainability in the **fisheries sector** involving total investment of £30 million. Investment of almost £70 million will create a seafood processing industry of scale and with international competitiveness and investment of £60 million will further assist the development of the aquaculture sector. The sustainable development of aquaculture will be underpinned also by the streamlined licensing system, incorporating an independent appeals board, which is now successfully established, and by the ongoing development of Co-ordinated Local Aquaculture Management Systems (CLAMS) for key production areas.

We have already invested over £42 million in up to 150 harbours and landing places around the entire coast and we are investing a further £66 million under the NDP. Major modernisation programmes are underway at Killybegs, Ros-a-Mhil, Dingle, Castletownbere and Greencastle and we are reviewing the management of the State's Fishery Harbour Centres so that local harbour users and communities can be more involved in the management and development of their harbour resources.

The Government has tackled **safety issues** head on and we are introducing new regulations to make training mandatory for fishermen and make it compulsory to wear lifejackets. The skippers and crews of almost 400 vessels have already benefited from assistance to purchase and install crucial safety and life saving equipment and we anticipate that a further 300 vessels will avail of the new safety equipment scheme. We have also introduced tough new laws to deal with collisions and safety standards on the high seas.

We have vastly improved safety and training for the fishing industry by building a £500,000 Fisheries Training Centre in Castletownbere and extending the National Fisheries Training Centre in Donegal. We have addressed further training issues through a Task Force on Training and Employment in the industry.

Investment of £11 million under the NDP will provide essential training for people currently working in the seafood sector and to assist in attracting new people into the industry. A new seafood marketing initiative, involving funding of £6 million, will seek to ensure that Irish seafood enjoys a premium position on world wide markets.

The National Common Fisheries Policy Strategy Group, established by this Government, has published a comprehensive report on the 2002 review of the **Common Fisheries Policy**. This Government has already made a substantial contribution to the first major EU debate on the CFP and we are working to position Ireland strongly in the Review.

This Government has taken the lead in Europe on innovative fish conservation measures. An Irish **Sea Cod Recovery Programme** has been introduced, and we are pursuing further plans to save critical stocks. The Government has also secured important new quotas and increased quotas for key fish species including tuna.

We have launched a major new management, conservation and development strategy for Ireland's **inshore fisheries sector** and we have increased funding for the sector from £70,000 per annum to almost £3 million. Inshore Fisheries Committees have been established and local facilitators appointed around the coast to empower local communities in shaping policy and initiatives for their areas. Grant aid is also being made available for the first time to allow inshore fishing communities to diversify into marine tourism activities.

Consumer safety and industry confidence in Irish seafood is also top of our agenda and we have radically overhauled the National Biotoxins Monitoring and Testing Programme for shellfish, to ensure high safety standards for Irish seafood.

Irish **Marine Research** has entered a new era under this Government, following publication of the first ever Strategy for Marine Research and Development. A comprehensive survey of the Irish seabed, costing £21 million, is progressing, in parallel with a major programme of marine RTDI, and an unprecedented expansion of our laboratory capacity around the coast. Ireland's dedicated marine research vessel "Celtic Voyager" was introduced by this Government in 1997 and the contract has been signed for construction of a second (£25 million) vessel "Celtic Explorer". These two vessels will have the combined capability to survey and research all of Ireland's underwater territories, which amount to 90% of Ireland's National Territory.

The Government has shown its commitment to protecting and developing our salmon resource by introducing conservation measures and establishing the **National Salmon Commission** as a forum for all salmon interests. Our inland fisheries have also benefited from radical new management structures introduced by this Government, and from the ongoing development of catchment management.

The NDP will support investment of some £31 million on development of recreational and tourism angling.

We are implementing a major programme of coastal protection under the NDP, involving an investment of £41 million. £21 million has already been spent protecting our coastline from erosion in the last four years.

The Government has introduced the first ever dedicated **marine tourism and leisure investment programme**. A total investment of £30 million in the sector is planned under the NDP. The investment will allow for marine infrastructure developments right around our coast and four major pilot marina schemes are already progressing. We are also developing new and innovative pilot projects to attract investment in marine tourism at key coastal areas where there is little current investment or employment.

99% of Ireland's trade, by volume, is carried through our seaports. We have been to the fore in ensuring competitiveness and efficiency in our ports: £121 million will be invested in the seaports sector under the NDP; we have established a single Port Company for the Shannon Estuary; we are in the process of corporatising Drogheda and Wicklow Ports, to allow them to become more competitive and diversify into new activities; and the structure of the Irish ports industry is being radically assessed, to ensure delivery of quality and competitive services. We have also established Task Forces to examine the potential for use of port lands and to tackle traffic issues at major ports.

We have put in place a competitive fiscal regime and established the Irish Maritime Development Office to support development of a strong merchant-shipping sector.

This Government will also be responsible for building Ireland's first ever **National Maritime College**, in Cork, with construction scheduled to commence in 2002.

Safety on the water has been the hallmark of the Government's marine policy, reflected in the ongoing active promotion of safety awareness and high safety standards. The Government has also established the Irish Coast Guard, which is now undergoing its first review. The Coast Guard has rescued or assisted over 24,000 people in the last four years. They have managed almost 7,000 incidents including pollution at sea. We have extended the Coast Guard's responsibilities to include our inland waterways.

A **Marine Casualty Investigation Board** is being established, which will have statutory powers to investigate marine casualties. Safety regulations for pleasure craft (including jet skis and fast power craft) were introduced on 1 July 2001, to ensure the highest safety standards for all water users. The activities of adventure centres are also to be regulated for the first time ever through the Adventure Activities Standards Authority Act, 2001.

Proposals for integrated coastal zone management and administration are also being advanced.

We are continuing to actively support **minerals, oil and gas exploration**. The Corrib Gasfield was declared commercial in January 2001. The gas from this field will come on stream in 2003 and will provide energy for industry and Irish consumers up to 2018. This will bring Natural Gas to parts of the West of Ireland for the first time ever, thus providing an important support for development of the region.

The total investment in the forestry sector under the NDP will be over £700 million. Around £540 million relates to financial incentives for those who plant. The balance of the funding is ear-marked for a range of activities right across the sector, from woodland improvements to harvesting, from research to infrastructure and from sectoral development to training.

COFORD, the national forest research co-ordinating body, will undertake a programme of forestry related research involving expenditure of £13 million. Themes to be covered include carbon sequestration, forests and water and forest health and vitality.

Significant increases (of over 30%) were secured last year in the financial incentives for all afforestation carried out since 2000. Considerable progress has been made in securing substantial increases for those who planted in earlier years.

A strategic review of Coillte Teoranta was completed by independent consultants. A number of the key issues identified such as saw-milling capacity and market development, are being considered by the Timber Industry Development Group. The Group expects to submit its report to the Tánaiste before the end of the year. The need for improved efficiencies as identified by the consultants is being actively pursued by Coillte.

A suite of environmental measures was launched last year. This should ensure that Ireland's forests are managed on a sustainable basis in line with best international practice.

DEFENCE

The **White Paper on Defence**, the first in the history of the State, was published in February 2000, and meets all of the objectives set for it in the Action Programme for the Millennium. It sets out a very positive developmental approach to defence in Ireland over the next ten years and involves the reshaping of the Defence Organisation, based on a revised total manpower level of 10,500 for the Permanent Defence Force with the option of an additional 250 recruits in training to free up the necessary resources for **equipment and infrastructure investment**. There will also be a development of the Reserve Defence Force involving better equipment and training.

Implementation of the White Paper is now well underway and very significant progress has been achieved. The full implementation of the White Paper will ensure that Ireland has a modern, sustainable Defence Forces, second to none, with the depth and flexibility to respond to current and future demands at home and to maintain a significant contribution to **peace support activities overseas**.

The White Paper also involves a new, unprecedented £250 million investment programme in equipment and infrastructure. This builds on an investment of some £180 million in new equipment and infrastructure in the period since the government took office.

As the modernisation process develops, it is vitally important that the Defence Forces must offer rewarding and challenging careers to its personnel. The White Paper recognises the importance of the **career dimension** for members of the Defence Forces and provides for the preparation of an updated and very comprehensive integrated personnel management plan to address this and related issues. A key feature of this plan will be a continuation of our policy of **regular recruitment**, which is now in place in order to achieve an improved age profile in the Permanent Defence Force.

Arising from special studies of the Air Corps and the Naval Service and reflecting the policy parameters laid down in the White Paper, implementation plans have been drawn up for the **Air Corps and the Naval Service**, including new organisation structures.

Our White Paper also makes recommendations about new civil service structures for the Department of Defence and an enhanced role for the civil-military Strategic Management Committee (SMC). These have now been implemented and the new arrangements are working well.

Significant steps have been taken to provide the basis for the future development of **Civil Defence**. It's our aim to develop Civil Defence as a top class second line emergency service and the organisation will continue to focus its efforts on enhancing its capacity to respond to emergencies as a high-quality second line service while also facilitating community support activities.

The White Paper on Defence ensures that this trend will be continued and developed in the context of an increase in the Civil Defence Budget and the proposed updating of legislation with the aim of enacting a new Civil Defence Bill by the end of this year. The training given to civil defence members will continue to be revised and updated in line with best practice, and equipment and infrastructure needs will be addressed.

ETHICS

The Government has made clear its determination to ensure that people's confidence in the democratic process is restored. The Government has worked hard across a broad front to bring about a more rigorous regulatory framework for public affairs.

On entering office, we undertook to restore confidence in public life through a credible policing mechanism for ethical issues and to follow up on the **recommendations of the McCracken Tribunal**. Arising from this, a number of companies became the subject of inquiries. A number of investigations, in addition to the appointment of High Court inspectors, were established under the Companies Act, 1990.

Following the DIRT Inquiry report we established a **Review Group on Auditing** to review the regulation, operation and professional standards in the accounting and auditing profession. The Government endorsed the main recommendations in the Review Group's Report and work has now commenced in drafting the necessary company law legislation to give effect to the Report's recommendations. We have established an interim Irish Auditing and Accounting Supervisory Authority pending the enactment of the necessary legislation to establish it on a statutory basis.

The public is entitled to know how they are governed. Prior to the summer recess, we enacted the groundbreaking **Standards in Public Office Act, 2001**, which will establish a 'Standards in Public Office Commission' to watch over our democratic institutions. The new Commission will take on the role of the existing Public Office Commission in relation to the Ethics and Electoral Acts. This highly significant legislative measure provides for tax clearance certification not only for politicians, but also senior public servants and the judiciary. It provides for the preparation of codes of conduct, which set out the highest ethical standards for those in public life. The Standards in Public Office Act, and the legislative measures already introduced, are a clear demonstration that we, as a Government, are determined that public life is governed by the highest ethical standards.

In this regard we have also enacted the **Local Government (Disclosure of Donations and Expenditure) Act, 1999**. It provides for the disclosure of donations over £500 to candidates in Local Elections. Legislation has been enacted to provide for amendments to the Electoral Act, 1997, concerning the disclosure of donations for political purposes and the regulation of expenditure at elections by political parties and candidates in the Electoral (Amendment) Act, 1998.

We also recently enacted the **Prevention of Corruption (Amendment) Act, 2001**. Previously our laws relating to corruption were based on the Prevention of Corruption Acts of 1889, 1906 and 1916. This piece of legislation, in addition to modernising and strengthening the law against corruption generally, will enable Ireland to ratify EU, Council of Europe and OECD Conventions on corruption. The conventions oblige Ireland to apply its law on corruption to a wide range of national and foreign office holders and officials.

Our new corruption Act extends the offence of corruption to include indirect corruption such as where a third party (e.g. a spouse) is given a benefit to wield influence. The provisions will extend to Local Government. Penalties are severe with unlimited fines and up to ten years in jail. The Bill will remedy the deficiencies in previous Ethics legislation, which omitted TDs, and Senators from the definition of an office holder.

This year, we also enacted the Local Government Act. This sets out for the first time a **comprehensive ethics framework / standards regime for Local Government** covering both officials and elected councillors.

We are the first Government to work under **Freedom of Information** legislation and we are in the process of implementing a further ambitious programme of extensions of the Act.

The Freedom of Information Act now applies successfully to a wide range of public bodies at central government, health board and local authority level including certain bodies in the voluntary health sector and also to RTE and TG4. A significant number of other public bodies in the cultural, social services, health, regulatory, environment and enterprise sectors were brought within the scope of the Act over the last year. Certain further bodies in the third-level education sector will be brought within the scope of the Act this year, subject to Oireachtas approval. Further extensions of the Act are being planned for 2002.

Work is now underway to develop legislation for the **registration of lobbyists** and for greater transparency in their activities. The Bill when published will provide for a regulation and registration system for those who operate on a paid basis as lobbyists in one form or another seeking to exert influence on political and public service decision-making.

The Bill will cover lobbying of elected representatives, public bodies and public servants, national and local. Since this matter pertains directly to the members of both Houses, the Government will consult with the membership of the Oireachtas as to how registration of lobbyists can be achieved.

The **Whistleblowers** legislation which we are advancing will provide for protection of persons who bring to light breaches of the law in public and other bodies.

The Electoral (Amendment) Bill, 2000 proposed a number of changes to the way elections are organised and conducted in Ireland. We had hoped that this Bill would have completed all stages in the Oireachtas before the summer recess, but we now intend to revisit some of the issues it contained following the summer recess.

In particular, we are determined to enact legislation, which will require every public representative to deposit donations received for political purposes into a **special account**. This requirement will also apply to political parties at all levels and it will be an offence not to pay money so donated into such an account. In addition, public representatives will have to certify on an annual basis that all donations were lodged in that account and were used for legitimate political purposes. Provision also to require parties to furnish audited accounts to the Public Office Commission.

Further stipulations in relation to **political donations** which we are determined to bring into law include the introduction of limits on the amount which an individual candidate or public representative or political party can receive from one source in any given year. The amount of a donation, which any political party can receive from any single source in any given year, shall be limited to £20,000. The amount which any individual public representative or candidate can receive from any single source in any given year shall be limited to £5,000.

TOURISM & SPORT

The last four years have seen unprecedented growth in the tourism sector. **Overseas visitor numbers** have increased by 25% from 5.1 million in 1997 to 6.4 million in 2000. **Foreign earnings** from tourism reached an all-time high of £3 billion, representing an increase of over 38% in the last four years.

Today tourism is providing jobs for 145,000 people, or one in every twelve people in the workforce. Tourism has come to play a major role in our thriving economy. Our growth levels in the sphere remain unmatched by any other European country and are a source of considerable pride. As a government, we have continually sought to build on our achievements. This is reflected in the fact that a target of 5% annual growth in tourism foreign earnings and the creation of **an extra 50,000 jobs** has been set over the timeframe of the National Development Plan.

The recent growth in tourism has been assisted by major new promotional and destination marketing campaigns. The 2001 Exchequer funding figure approved for Bord Fáilte represents their **highest ever level of State funding for tourism promotion**, and includes special funding to cope with market difficulties arising from this year's Foot and Mouth crisis, so that the sector can remain on course with our targets, especially over the next five years of the NDP.

To ensure the exceptional growth of our tourism industry continues, the Government launched the first ever **Tourism Marketing Fund** with a provision of £150 million over the period of the National Development Plan.

The North/South Ministerial Council agreed in Belfast on 27th October 2000, to the establishment of a **new-all island tourism marketing company**, Tourism Ireland Ltd (TIL). The new company will have responsibility for tourism brand Ireland, strategic all-island destination marketing in all markets outside the island of Ireland, international roll out of regional and product marketing programmes formulated by Bord Fáilte and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and operation of the overseas office network.

Our priority regarding the state of Irish tourism has been to ensure that the full benefits of the industry are spread across the entire country. A long-term concern in our tourist industry is that not all regions have enjoyed the same large levels of growth. To address this factor funding of £100 million is being made available under the National Development Plan, which will be used to specifically support new investment in tourism product development in underdeveloped and developing regions.

Dramatic changes in the tourism sector which, combined with a changing demographic structure, has resulted in strong demand for **skilled labour** to adapt to rapid sectoral changes and industry demands. To ensure that our tourism industry continues to forge ahead of our international competitors, a further £100 million in the National Development Plan will be used by CERT to help address challenges in training, recruitment and staff retention in the tourism sector over the next five to six years.

Sport is an integral part of Irish life and culture and we will continue to promote, develop and sustain the interest and participation of the people of this sporting nation. We recognise the value of leisure activities to the physical and mental well being of every individual, especially in the role they can play in fostering a sense of achievement, community identity and social participation.

For this reason, we have made sport a central element of our social inclusion strategy. Realising that involvement in sport and recreation has a positive influence on the character formation of young people we have a particular focus on areas of disadvantage in our allocation of resources. We have ensured for the first time that the Sports portfolio is represented at cabinet and the priority we have attached to sport is being matched by our achievements.

Since this Government took office there has been a **six-fold increase in sports funding** and this is ensuring a considerably enhanced range and quality of programmes and top class facilities from national level to local community clubs and centres throughout the country.

The four years of this government has seen unprecedented development of local and national facilities including the long awaited **50-metre swimming pool**. Under the Sports Capital Programme, since this Government took office, we have allocated grants to the value of £102 million to almost 2,000 projects for the provision of sporting and recreational facilities by voluntary community sporting organisations in the parishes, towns and cities of Ireland. These allocations represent a substantial increase in funding over the £18 million provided for sports facilities over the three years 1995 to 1997 by the last government.

The National Boxing Stadium has been refurbished and the indoor athletics training facility at Morton Stadium, and the National Rowing Centre, in respect of which grants have been awarded, are at the planning stages of development. Under the NDP, a sum of £85 million will be allocated for the provision of community sport and recreational facilities at centres throughout the country to be identified in the National Spatial Strategy.

We have also made a landmark commitment to build a new national stadium that will match the best facilities anywhere else in the world. **Stadium & Sports Campus Ireland** will cater for a large number of sports and activities, providing a range of top-class facilities for their training and competitive needs.

Funding for the **local authority swimming pool programme** has been increased from £3 million in 1999 to £15 million per year for the period 2000-2002. The Government is working with the local authorities to ensure an effective draw down of funds in respect of the renovation of existing swimming pools and the provision of new pools.

We have delivered on our commitment to create a new statutory **National Sports Council**, which is working closely with the national governing bodies of sport and other agencies and organisations for the promotion and development of sport. In Budget 2001, the Government announced that we intend to double the annual budget of the Sports Council over the next four years to £20 million and as a first step we increased the budget of the Sports Council by £2.5 million.

The creation of local sports partnerships, as envisaged in the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness, has been incorporated into the Sports Council's Statement of Strategy. The Council is currently piloting the concept amongst eight local partnerships. These are located in Clare, Donegal, Fingal, Kildare, Laois, Roscommon, Sligo and Tipperary North.

As a government, we have taken a very strong line in opposition to drugs in sport. The first ever **national anti-doping programme** is now in place, and being operated by the Sports Council. Over 620 tests, both in and out of competition, were carried out in the first year. The Government has also approved a Declaration Order to be made under the Misuse of Drugs Act, which includes bringing under control certain substances, which are suspected of being abused in sport. It covers most of the substances on the current list of banned substances in sport. Ireland is now among 40 of the 200 countries, which participate in international competitions, with its own anti-doping in sport programme.

Administration of the **International Carding Scheme**, launched in May 1998, has been transferred to the new Sports Council. Since 1998, when it was introduced, the International Carding Scheme has provided around £4.5 million to our elite and developing top competitors for their individual development.

In addition, the Paralympic Council of Ireland received total grant aid of £278,500 to cover the costs of preparation for and participation in the Paralympic Games in Sydney. As we promised in the Programme for Government, we have substantially increased grant aid to **Special Olympics Ireland**. Ireland has also been successful in its bid to host 2003 Special Olympics.

ARTS, HERITAGE, GAELTACHT & THE ISLANDS

Our Government's Programme recognises the important place of arts, culture, heritage and the Irish language in our national life and the need to invest in and develop them. Four years of Government action has resulted in major progress in achieving the objectives outlined both in the Action Programme for the Millennium and in the Review of that Programme.

Arts in all parts of the country has benefited from what has been the **largest ever annual increase in Arts Council funding**. The allocation of a £26 million budget for the Arts Council in 1998 delivered on one of the key priorities in the Action Programme for the Millennium. This ensured the completion of the first Arts Plan a full year ahead of the timescale set out by the previous government.

With the conclusion of the first plan, we considered it desirable that a comprehensive independent review be carried out in order to help inform the development of a **new Arts Plan**. The consultants were asked to pay particular attention to the key Government priorities as identified in the Action Programme for the Millennium. This major review involving wide ranging public consultation was published. It was generally welcomed as a comprehensive and significant review of the Arts sector in Ireland.

In drawing up its second Arts Plan, the Arts Council set out to re-evaluate, reorganise and radically re-invigorate the place of the arts at the heart of Irish society. As a government, we provided tangible evidence of our support for the new strategic approach by delivering an unprecedented financial commitment of £100 million over the period of the Plan (1999 – 2001) to allow the Arts Council to implement the Plan in full.

In our revised Action Programme, we undertook to carry out a review of the Arts Acts legislation, following an extensive level of public consultation. The many views that emerged in the course of these consultative processes were carefully analysed and were taken account of in drafting proposals for revised legislation. Government approval has now been given for the drafting of the new Arts Bill.

Overall investment of close on £65 million in arts and cultural infrastructure is taking place over the four year period since this Government took office. A total of 38 arts and culture projects, spread over 18 counties will be developed by the time the scheme concludes later this year.

It is our intention that this level of investment will continue well into the new millennium so that the cultural facilities, which should be available to all our citizens, are provided. Last year, we announced details of a new scheme to assist in the provision and development of centres for arts and cultural activities around the country, to be known as the Arts & Culture Capital Enhancement Support Scheme (ACCESS). A total of £36 million will be allocated to it over the four years 2001 - 2004. Significantly, the primary aim of the scheme is to ensure that all our citizens have easy access to adequate venues for the creation, expression and appreciation of arts and culture.

In addition to **ACCESS funding**, a further £9 million is being made available to other capital developments, which are deemed important to encourage social inclusion and ensure a regional spread of arts infrastructure.

This Government's commitment to the establishment of an independent and autonomous **Academy for the Performing Arts** was reflected in the Programme for Government, which identified as a key priority the establishment of a Centre for the Performing Arts, incorporating a Conservatoire. A Planning and Steering Group has been set up to move to the next phase in the development of the Academy for which a capital allocation of £35 million was allocated last year to develop an education and training institution of the highest quality for young talent.

Modifying the school curriculum to place more emphasis on cultural and artistic activities is a key priority under the Action Programme for the Millennium. An inter-departmental liaison committee has now been established to examine this whole area. It is important that access to our Heritage is also fostered in the education system. As part of our overall education strategy, we have abolished charges for school groups to all **Heritage Sites** and in the year 2000 over 68,000 school children visited sites under this scheme.

There are a number of commitments in relation to the music industry in the Government Programme. A **Music Board of Ireland** has been established, with joint funding by the Government and IBEC, to develop the Irish music industry, both at home and abroad, in the coming years, and to maximise its economic benefit.

In fulfilment of the Government's commitment to ensuring access to the arts for all sectors within society, support was provided for 'Arts Intervention', a Horizon Thematic project, which examined the level of access for the disabled to the arts and the development of quality disability arts practices across the country. The report, published in April 2000, concluded that arts organisations should actively consult with the disabled to attract them as audience, creators and producers and that structures should be developed to promote the take up of arts initiatives by disabled people.

On entering Government, we viewed it as essential for the sustainable development of the **Irish Film Industry** that a long-term strategic policy be formulated. In line with our commitments, we set up the Film Industry Strategy Review Group, a think-tank to formulate proposals for a strategic plan for the future of the industry into the next decade.

On the basis of the Film Industry Think-Tank Report, Government approval has now been obtained for the extension of the Section 481 investment incentive scheme for five years, up to April 2005, to give an unprecedented platform of stability for the industry. Additional resources have now been allocated to the Irish Film Board so as to ensure that it can implement its newly defined dynamic role of directing the strategic plan for our film industry.

We have also delivered on our pledge to establish a **Screen Commission**. Its function is to promote Ireland as a location and centre of excellence for film-making, and to encourage and facilitate international film-makers to make their films in Ireland.

Addressing the real and urgent needs of the national cultural institutions is a Government objective. Historically these institutions have been under resourced in financial, staff and capital investment terms. A number of major projects are underway which will significantly improve the services provided by these institutions and increase public access to the major national collections.

Among the major capital cultural projects that have been completed since June 1997 are the Chester Beatty Library and Museum, refurbishment of the Deputy Master's House at the Irish Museum of Modern Art, and the second phase of the National Museum at Collins Barracks, Dublin. Projects that will be completed this year include the National Folklife Museum, Turlough Park, Co. Mayo and the new Millennium Wing of the National Gallery.

Significantly increased funding has been made available to the main national cultural institutions. Additional staff provided at the National Museum and National Library has allowed for improved service to the public, particularly in the areas of education and outreach projects and the development of new exhibitions. A **Council of National Cultural Institutions** has also been established to act as a forum for discussion and co-operation in developing these important bodies who hold our national heritage collections.

We have also approved and launched a major expansion scheme for the National Archives. This development will address the Archive's long-term storage needs in particular and to facilitate the provision of records relating to the modern Irish State to our citizens, historians, students, and to visitors from abroad.

In opposition, we promised that our policies for museums would embrace not just the national cultural institutions funded directly by the State but also the entire museum sector throughout the country. Delivering on this commitment, in November 1999, statutory powers were devolved to eight Local Authority run museums - these "designated" museums are in Cavan, Cork, Donegal, Kerry, Limerick, Louth, Monaghan and Tipperary South Riding. This number is to increase to ten in the near future.

In the area of broadcasting, this Government recognised that the legislative framework needed major improvements to deal with rapidly changing technology, including **digital broadcasting** and the convergence of telecommunications and broadcasting technologies. In particular, it was necessary to provide for the introduction of digital terrestrial television (DTT), which the Government sees as the television delivery platform that will be able to provide digital television and information society services on a universal basis or as near to that concept as is practically feasible.

Major progress has been made with the enactment of the Broadcasting Act, 2001, which will facilitate the introduction of digital terrestrial broadcasting, as well as Government Programme commitments on statutory independence for Teilifis na Gaeilge, a once-off capital fund of £500,000 to assist the local independent radio sectors, the abolition of the 3% levy on advertising revenue paid by independent broadcasters. The Act also provides for an expansion of the functions of the IRTC - to be renamed the Broadcasting Commission of Ireland - and an important clarification of RTE's public service remit as the national broadcaster.

A significant achievement is the passing into law of the Major Events Television Coverage Bill giving effect to the commitment in our Action Programme to **protect the viewing of major domestic sporting events** on free air to television.

It is our objective to produce, for the first time in the history of the State, an integrated plan for the national heritage. Work on the preparation of the **National Heritage Plan** is nearing completion with a view to its publication later this year. The Plan will set out our priorities, strategies and actions for the future and has involved a detailed review of the existing administrative, funding, legislative and structural arrangements for the national heritage, and of the role of the wider community.

The enactment of the **Wildlife Amendment Act, 2000**, marked a major modernisation of the legislation position in the wildlife area. The introduction of this legislation had been promised by successive Governments for the last 14 years. The Act is designed to significantly strengthen the level and effectiveness of protection that is afforded to our natural heritage and specifically provides for statutory protection of National Heritage Areas, including geological sites; improved measures to enforce the conservation of wildlife species and their habitats; and compliance with international agreements.

As set out in our Action Programme, we have undertaken a major review of implementation of the **Habitats Directive**. In keeping with our commitment to maximise consultation with all affected parties, a further 1,500 landowners, land users and licence holders were directly contacted in relation to the SAC proposals. Other arrangements to facilitate public consultation include continued successful operation of the SAC Appeals Advisory Board and encouragement for Local Liaison Committees for all SACs. We have now completed the formal transmission to the EU of 362 candidate Special Area of Conservation (SAC) sites. Major initiatives have been undertaken which will facilitate protection of raised bogs, while being sensitive to the needs of small domestic turf-cutters, and will achieve significant reduction in sheep numbers on overgrazed commonages.

Meanwhile, we have also implemented the most comprehensive set of measures for the protection of our architectural heritage since the foundation of the State. It includes establishment of the **National Inventory of Architectural Heritage** on a statutory basis, new grant aid schemes for approved conservation works and, strengthening of listing system of local authorities.

In November 2000, we announced an integrated £100 million strategy under the National Development Plan for the conservation, preservation and presentation of National Monuments in the period to 2006.

Waterways Ireland was established under the British Irish Agreement Act, 1999, on 1st April 2000. Its headquarters are in Enniskillen, with regional offices at Dublin, Scarrif and Carrick-on-Shannon. The transfer of staff to the new body has been completed, which has responsibility for the development of waterways North and South.

The Government's objectives to preserve and support the Irish language and to promote the **sustainable development of our populated islands** are being actively pursued across a range of Departments. We established an Interdepartmental Committee on Islands, Gaeltacht and Irish Language to ensure policies are implemented effectively and that the delivery of state services to islands and the Gaeltacht is co-ordinated.

Our Government Programme contains a strong commitment in relation to ensuring that Irish speakers will have the legal right and the daily opportunity to conduct their business with the State, with local authorities and with public agencies through the medium of Irish. It is clear that such a commitment can only be implemented through the enactment of legislation. Earlier this year, the Government approved the General Scheme of the **Official Languages Equality Bill** and authorised the drafting of the text of the Bill by the Parliamentary Draftsman as a matter of priority.

The Government also approved the establishment of a special **Commission on the Irish Language in the Gaeltacht** last year. The remit of the Commission is to make recommendations to Government with regard to strengthening the Irish Language as the spoken language of the Gaeltacht. It is anticipated that the Commission will report to Government before the end of the year.

The cutbacks under the previous government in **investment programmes in access for offshore islands** and **infrastructural improvements in Gaeltacht areas** have been reversed in line with the commitment in An Action Programme for the Millennium. Additional finance has been provided for Gaeltacht schemes such as Housing Grant Schemes and Irish Learners Schemes.

In total, in excess of £10.6 million was spent in 2000 on projects aimed at improving the economic, social, physical and cultural infrastructure of the Gaeltacht regions. This figure includes the additional funding secured under the NDP for the improvement of Strategic Gaeltacht roads as part of a seven-year programme to provide one road of suitable quality to each Gaeltacht area. In addition, just over £4.6 million was spent in 2000 on enhancements to the infrastructure and accessibility of our populated offshore islands.

TRANSPORT

We view an effective public transport system as one of the keys to the economic life of this country in the 21st century. Our aim is to provide a more efficient and reliable system of public transport that will assist greater mobility, relieve congestion and shift the emphasis from private car ownership to public transport. We are actively promoting the use of all forms of public transport by increasing investment in it.

The National Development Plan sets out a £2.2 billion medium term investment strategy. Our investment priorities include implementation of DTO plans, including quality bus corridors, LUAS, DART and commuter rail extensions; the improvement of park and ride facilities and more extended services to meet growing public need. Public-Private Partnership arrangements will be used, where appropriate and cost-efficient, to advance some of these projects.

Full services commenced on the Greystones and Malahide DART line in December 2000. Ten new DART carriages entered service in this month also. A further sixteen entered service during summer 2001. Twenty diesel railcars were also delivered this year and are in the process of entering service on the upgraded Connolly to Maynooth line.

The National Development Plan makes provision for a £1.6 billion investment in the Greater Dublin Area over the period of the Plan. Our public transport strategy for the Greater Dublin Area comprises an integrated package of measures covering bus, rail, light rail, metro, integration measures, traffic management and demand management and is designed to provide a public transport product which will give a real alternative to private car commuting.

This Government has taken a number of important initiatives to improve public bus transport in the Greater Dublin Area. Overall, £220 million will be invested in **the bus network** in Dublin and the surrounding counties. This will involve the purchase of 275 additional buses to increase the fleet by 28% and the replacement of over 500 existing buses.

This strategy is dependent on the bus having priority on the road network and the eight QBCs already in place have proved a success. The strategy is designed to improve greatly the quality, reliability, frequency and speed of bus services. The objective is to provide a much better mesh of bus services - radial, orbital and local and there is already evidence of improved customer reaction to the new buses already introduced.

Suburban rail development in Dublin is being addressed in two distinct parts; a short-term strategy and a longer-term development programme. The short-term strategy is clearly focused on maximising the use which can be made of the existing suburban rail network. This includes a significant increase in capacity through acquisition of rolling stock, improvements in signalling and infrastructure, improving existing stations and opening new stations. Total investment will be £185 million, and as mentioned already above, expanded services are being introduced in the DART and suburban services.

DART capacity has been increased by almost 50% and suburban rail by over 25%. In the longer term, however, it is the plan to develop rail services further with an increase in the capacity of the rail network, especially in the city centre.

In line with our commitment in the Programme for Government, further progress has been made in regard to the provision of a light rail network for Dublin. The National Development Plan makes full provision for the implementation of the enhanced and extended light rail network approved by Government in May 1998.

Significant progress was made on the **Dublin light rail (LUAS) project** over the last year. Preparatory physical works on the project, involving mainly utility divisions works and necessary road works, were advanced and in some cases completed. Many other contracts are now complete, particularly on the Tallaght to Abbey Street line. The contractor for the main construction work, involving mainly track-laying and cabling has commenced work on both routes.

In May, the first Dublin tram was completed and unveiled at an official ceremony in London. After testing, the tram will be delivered to Dublin in October 2001. The remaining 39 Dublin trams will be delivered to Dublin at a rate of 2 per month. Overall progress on construction of the system is on target for completion in 2003.

In July 2000, the Government approved, in principle, the development of a metro system for Dublin, to be procured on a Public Private Partnership (PPP) basis. We instructed the Light Rail Project Office (LRPO) to commence the necessary preparatory work on the metro system; and approved the drafting of necessary legislation.

It is expected that, over the next few months, the **Railway Procurement Agency** will be established, the PPP procurement policy framework will be completed and that formal procurement of the metro will commence with particular priority on a line from the City Centre to the Airport and Blanchardstown.

As a government, we view the **better integration of public transport** in Dublin city as a matter of crucial importance. A total of £50 million has been set aside to promote integration in a practical way. This will be used to provide an extra 3,700 park and ride places; introduce integrated ticketing; develop interchange facilities which will make it easier to transfer from bus to bus or from one mode to another; and, to develop real time passenger information systems as part of a wider strategy in providing accessible and quality information to the public on the actual movements of bus and rail mode public transport vehicles.

£150 million is earmarked for the **regional transport system** for re-equipping Bus Éireann's fleet, enhancing public transport in the cities outside Dublin and improving access to public transport. The National Development Plan provides for an investment of £50 million for the upgrading of public transport in Cork, Galway, Limerick and Waterford. The investment will focus initially on improvements to bus services, including the purchase of 173 new buses for Bus Éireann's provincial urban services. The NDP also provides for an amount of £3.5 million for the establishment of a pilot programme to encourage the development of local or community based public transport initiatives in rural areas.

After years of neglect, major progress is being made on the **revitalisation of the mainline railway network**. The National Development Plan makes provision for an investment of £500 million in mainline rail over the period 2000-2006. This includes a sum of £350 million for the continuation of the Railway Safety Programme 1999-2003 and a further £150 million for non-safety related investments such as the purchase of new rolling stock, the upgrading of railway stations and the renewal of railway plant and equipment. It is planned that by end 2003 practically all the track on InterCity routes will be converted to continuously welded rail.

Significant progress has been made in terms of the regulation of the bus market. In December 2000, we revised the Guidelines under which bus licence applications in the Greater Dublin Area are considered. A licensing round, with the objective of encouraging private operators to provide additional bus services in the Greater Dublin Area, was launched. Twenty-one licence offers were made and where offers are accepted, it is anticipated that the services authorised by these licences will be operational by year-end.

It has long been our policy to encourage the introduction of **new sustainable air routes** to and from Ireland. Since last year, Aer Lingus has, for example, begun offering services to two new US destinations - Los Angeles and Washington. Services to both destinations now operate daily.

Overall, traffic through Irish airports continues to grow. The Dublin/London route is now the second busiest in the world, having overtaken the London/Paris route two years ago.

The number of carriers offering cargo services out of Shannon and Dublin Airports continues to grow. Shannon now offers a number of new routes for the fast delivery of goods to destinations throughout the US, Europe, the Middle and Far East and from there to the Pacific Rim Countries.

Passenger traffic at the three State airports grew by 9% in 2000 to a total of almost 18 million passengers. **Aer Rianta** is investing more than £550 million over the 1999-2003 period in facilities at the three State airports to cater for this growth.

In February 2001, Aer Rianta raised £250 million in a Eurobond issue, which it used to restructure its debt profile and to assist with its ongoing capital expenditure programme at the State airports. It is recognised, however, that these initiatives represent no more than a temporary solution to the long-term funding requirements of Aer Rianta since significant capital investment at the three State airports to cater for growth in air traffic will be an ongoing necessity.

In this regard, we continue to concur with the view that limited private sector participation in Aer Rianta, whether through a minority IPO or otherwise, would be in the best long-term interests of the Company. It is recognised that private sector participation in Aer Rianta gives rise to certain issues of a strategic nature and the Government will continue to reflect on all options in our ongoing consideration of the future strategy for the Company.

The Government continues to **support regional air service links** through its support of the Public Service Obligation (PSO) air routes to the regions and through marketing and infrastructural grants. Under the National Development Plan 2000-2006, £11 million has been allocated to support essential infrastructure improvements at regional airports.

PUBLIC ENTERPRISE / E-COMMERCE

This Government is crucially aware that Ireland needs an e-commerce friendly environment if we wish to retain existing overseas investment, build on the successes achieved in such areas as software, electronics, and financial services and compete for and attract the new digital industries and opportunities. We will continue to actively pursue the positioning of Ireland as a **global leader in electronic commerce** and as a key player in the next generation internet technology.

Under the National Development Plan, £157.5 million of public funds have been designated to leverage investment in **advanced communications infrastructure and services**. The focus of this investment will be to support investment in communications and electronic commerce infrastructure systems and services in less developed areas. On foot of this, nine contracts are now underway which will bring advanced communications services to most parts of Ireland through a number of technologies.

In a major development, we entered into an agreement with Global Crossing, the international bandwidth provider, to connect Ireland seamlessly on the **Global Crossing network** to 36 European cities and the US. As a government, we pledged to pass on the benefits of this project to telecommunications companies and internet service providers at highly competitive rates. Most of the major telecommunications companies have purchased this capacity and this will speed up the roll-out of broadband services in Ireland.

A **world-class telehouse** has also been constructed offering point of interconnection in Dublin to the Global Crossing Network. A contract to manage and operate this telehouse was finalised in May 2000.

In order to move our IT sector up the value chain, the Government has committed £60m to the purchase of property for the Digital Hub, which will be located in the Liberties/Coombe area of Dublin, with the aim of making Ireland an international centre for high-tech research and cutting edge digital industry.

In addition, MediaLabEurope (MLE), a third level research & development institute, has been established under a partnership between the Irish Government and the world famous Massachusetts Institute of Technology. It is envisaged that MLE will become a resource which will benefit the wider community of technology companies in Ireland, attract increased multinational investment in research and development and train future generations in cutting edge digital technology research.

A pro-competitive environment, in which e-business will flourish is being promoted. The Government recently enacted the **E-Commerce Act**, which legislates for electronic contracts and signatures. Future follow up legislation will be examined should the need arise in view of forthcoming EU Directives in the E-Commerce area.

A substantial level of co-operation with our Northern counterparts in developing the **North-South Digital Corridor** has taken place.

A **Joint US-Ireland Communiqué on Electronic Commerce**, which identifies shared principles and points of common interest held by Ireland and the US in relation to the development of electronic commerce, was concluded in September 1998. The Department of Public Enterprise now works very closely with a number of US Departments to monitor e-commerce developments. In this regard, Ireland's first E-Commerce Attaché to Washington was appointed in May 2000.

Comprehensive legislation is also being prepared for Government to provide for the further enhancement of the effectiveness of the **regulatory framework for communications**. In March, following a public consultation process, the Government approved the drafting of a new Bill to be known as the Communications (Regulation) Bill. The Bill provides for the transformation of the position of Director of Telecommunications Regulation into a three person Commission and broadens the scope of the powers available to that Commission for effective regulation of the electronic communications sector.

Amongst its other provisions, are the reform of the legislative framework governing opening of roads by telecommunications operators, and the establishment of a framework for transposition into Irish law of the new European regulatory framework for the electronic communications sector.

The Electricity Regulation Act, 1999, represents the first phase in the liberalisation of the electricity market in Ireland. The Act established the long-awaited **Commission for Electricity Regulation** to oversee the electricity sector. The European Communities (internal Market in Electricity) Regulations, 2000, provide for the establishment of the independent electricity transmission system operator, EirGrid, as well as other regulatory matters. Our approach of a gradual introduction of liberalisation in the electricity market is the appropriate policy choice for Ireland rather than a faster or bigger opening of that market at the outset. Our electricity system is very small in comparison with our EU partners, and is not significantly interconnected.

The advent of full competition in the electricity market in the coming years, as in other sectors, will lead to downward pressure on prices, increased efficiency and improved levels of service. The net result of liberalisation should be of benefit to the whole economy, through greater competitiveness. The generation and supply of electricity were first opened to competition on 19th February 2000 and currently, market opening stands at about 31%. Market opening will increase to 40% in 2002, moving to full market opening in February 2005.

The market for **'green electricity'** has been fully liberalised since February 2000 and more recently, the Electricity Supply (Amendment) Act, 2001, provided for immediate full liberalisation of the CHP market. The conversion of the ESB to a public limited company will be provided for in the new Electricity Bill, which is at an advanced stage of preparation, and which will complete the liberalisation of the electricity sector.

Bord Gáis Éireann continues with its efforts to extend the gas grid, where it is economically viable to do so. Towns that were connected to the network during the year include Portlaoise, Stradbally, Trim, Kingscourt, Robinstown, Athy and Castledermot. Work is proceeding with the Dublin-Galway-Limerick gas transmission pipeline. Meanwhile, the Corrib Spur pipeline has been scheduled for completion in 2003. Castlebar, Claremorris, Tuam, and Athenry are expected to be among the towns to receive a natural gas supply from the pipeline.

An EU grant of £21 million was secured for the **peat-fired power station** in Edenderry. The new plant came into operation in December 2000, several months ahead of the planned completion date. Bord na Móna have completed their preparations and built-up peat stocks to supply 1 million tonnes of peat annually to the plant.

A Public Service Obligation Order will be made in respect of peat generation, for reasons of security of supply. This will lead to the construction of two new peat power stations by ESB by 2005, in line with the orderly closure of existing peat stations.

The Green Paper on **Sustainable Energy** was published in September 1999 and is assisting in the formulation of Government policy. Many of its recommendations are being implemented through the National Development Plan. We are currently engaged in the legislative process to establish the Irish Energy Centre as an independent body with the new title of the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland. This is a further stage in the implementation of the Green Paper and will allow the Centre to play an increased role in the

Government's policy on renewable and sustainable energy, particularly in helping Ireland meet its commitments under the Kyoto Protocol.

A **Renewable Energy Strategy Group** was established to examine all aspects of, and obstacles to the further deployment of all renewable energy technologies. Key elements of the Strategy Group report including network upgrading, the preparation of a wind energy resource map and the amendment of local authority development plans to incorporate areas suitable for wind energy projects, are being developed.

As a government, we are actively concerned with the extent to which other States comply with standards relating to regulation and control of the safety of nuclear installations and radioactive waste management activities. Ireland participated in the first peer review process under the Nuclear Safety Convention held in 1998. On 20th March, 2001, Ireland ratified the Joint Convention on Spent Fuel Management.

Our concern in relation to **Sellafield** include the Thorp reprocessing plant, the storage on site of high-level radioactive liquid waste, the old Magnox reactors and the ongoing radioactive discharges from Sellafield into the marine and terrestrial environment. These concerns continue to be raised both directly with the UK at Ministerial and Official level, and at every available opportunity in the relevant international and EU fora.

The Government has also expressed its objections to the proposed establishment of the Mixed Oxide (MOX) fuel fabrication plant at Sellafield. These objections have referred to the absence of an economic justification for the plant as required under EU law, and our wish to see greater disclosure of commercial data relating to the plant as the UK are required to do under law. We have engaged economic experts to strengthen the arguments which have been made to the UK Ministers. The Government has initiated a legal action against the UK under the OSPAR agreement, which is in train, and is also contemplating legal action under Community law should the UK give the go-ahead to the MOX plant.

Following the publication in February 2000 by the UK Nuclear Installations Inspectorate of three reports on Sellafield, two of which were severely critical of safety management and culture at the plant, the Taoiseach called for the closure of the plant. Last June, Ireland and Denmark tabled a motion calling for the ending of nuclear reprocessing at Sellafield. Twelve OSPAR countries adopted by a qualified decision, which effectively called on the UK and France to review, as a matter of priority, the implementation of the non-reprocessing option for nuclear spent fuel management. The OSPAR Decision intensifies the pressure on the UK Government to abandon nuclear reprocessing in the future.

The Flynn Report on the sub-post office network published in March this year outlined the serious financial difficulties facing An Post together with a wide range of scenarios, options and recommendations to guarantee the future viability of the network. An Inter Departmental Group was subsequently established to consider the future of the post office network.

The Government has reaffirmed its commitment to a **nationwide post office** and Government Services network throughout the State. As part of this commitment, we have approved an increase in the share capital of An Post by £10m. The investment is conditional on the delivery of a wide ranging reform package aimed at securing a long term, viable future for the post office network. It is also subject to State-aid clearance from the EU Commission.

The share capital (£5m this year and £5m next year) will pay the increases for Sub-Postmasters as recommended in the Flynn report, which is backdated to January 1st.

The Government accepted the report's primary conclusion that a package of reforms, implemented by the management of An Post, was necessary over a transition period to resolve the current financial problems facing the network. Without remedial action the network's losses will grow to an unsustainable level – forecast to reach in excess of £28 million per annum in 2004.

The Government has accepted a key recommendation of the working group that the post office network, which consists of 1800 sub post offices and 100 company offices, will move away from the current fixed-cost “retainer” model to an agency or variable cost model.

The Government also agreed that, in situations where it is impossible to continue a post office service on an agency basis, a Government Services Outlet would be developed. These new outlets are designed to underpin the delivery of Government services in rural areas where the economic basis would not sustain agency-based sub-post office structures. The concept will be developed so as to meet the needs of the community within each county. This would be done in conjunction with local authorities and other public agencies.

We are convinced that the implementation of the report and the share capital increase provides the grounds for a sustainable future for the network. The post office is an intrinsic part of life in many places. The Government remains committed to that network.

BILLS ENACTED SINCE GOVERNMENT CAME TO OFFICE ON 26 JUNE 1997

1. *Registration of Title (Amendment) Act, 1997*
2. *Interpretation (Amendment) Act, 1997*
3. *Merchant Shipping (Commissioners of Irish Lights) Act, 1997*
4. *Europol Act, 1997*
5. *Taxes Consolidation Act, 1997*
6. *Children Act, 1997*
7. *Transfer of Sentenced Persons (Amendment) Act, 1997*
8. *Tribunals of Inquiry (Evidence) (Amendment) Act, 1997*
9. *Courts (No. 2) Act, 1997*
10. *Irish Film Board (Amendment) Act, 1997*
11. *Appropriation Act, 1997*
12. *Scientific and Technological Education (Investment) Fund Act, 1997*
13. *Seventeenth Amendment of the Constitution Act, 1997*
14. *Referendum Act, 1998*
15. *Central Bank Act, 1998*
16. *Finance Act, 1998*
17. *Electoral (Amendment) Act, 1998*
18. *Oireachtas (Allowances to Members) and Ministerial, Parliamentary, Judicial and Court Offices (Amendment) Act, 1998*
19. *Social Welfare Act, 1998*
20. *Minister for Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands (Powers and Functions) Act, 1998*
21. *Courts Service Act, 1998*
22. *Local Government (Planning and Development) Act, 1998*
23. *Adoption Act, 1998*

24. ***Tribunals of Inquiry (Evidence) (Amendment) Act, 1998***
25. ***Civil Liability (Assessment of Hearing Injury) Act, 1998***
26. ***Oil Pollution of the Sea (Civil Liability and Compensation) (Amendment) Act, 1998***
27. ***Arbitration (International Commercial) Act, 1998***
28. ***Finance (No. 2) Act, 1998***
29. ***Local Government Act, 1998***
30. ***Gas (Amendment) Act, 1998***
31. ***Eighteenth Amendment of the Constitution Act, 1998***
32. ***Nineteenth Amendment of the Constitution Act, 1998***
33. ***Tribunals of Inquiry (Evidence) (Amendment) (No. 2) Act, 1998***
34. ***Electoral (Amendment) (No. 2) Act, 1998***
35. ***Merchant Shipping (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 1998***
36. ***Employment Equality Act, 1998***
37. ***Child Trafficking and Pornography Act, 1998***
38. ***Roads (Amendment) Act, 1998***
39. ***Air Navigation and Transport (Amendment) Act, 1998***
40. ***European Communities (Amendment) Act, 1998***
41. ***Turf Development Act, 1998***
42. ***Urban Renewal Act, 1998***
43. ***Intellectual Property (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 1998***
44. ***Food Safety Authority of Ireland Act, 1998***
45. ***Parental Leave Act, 1998***
46. ***Defence (Amendment) Act, 1998***
47. ***Firearms (Temporary Provisions) Act, 1998***
48. ***Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act, 1998***

49. ***Industrial Development (Enterprise Ireland) Act, 1998***
50. ***Geneva Conventions (Amendment) Act, 1998***
51. ***Criminal Justice (Release of Prisoners) Act, 1998***
52. ***Investor Compensation Act, 1998***
53. ***Economic and Monetary Union Act, 1998***
54. ***Offences Against the State (Amendment) Act, 1998***
55. ***International War Crimes Tribunals Act, 1998***
56. ***Plant Varieties (Proprietary Rights) (Amendment) Act, 1998***
57. ***Western Development Commission Act 1998***
58. ***Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Road Act, 1998***
59. ***State Property Act, 1998***
60. ***Tourist Traffic Act, 1998***
61. ***Voluntary Health Insurance (Amendment) Act, 1998***
62. ***Comptroller and Auditor General and Committees of the Houses of the Oireachtas (Special Provisions) Act, 1998***
63. ***Appropriation Act, 1998***
64. ***Protection for Persons Reporting Child Abuse Act, 1998***
65. ***George Mitchell Scholarship Fund Act, 1998***
66. ***Education Act, 1998***
67. ***Jurisdiction of Courts and Enforcement of Judgements Act, 1998***
68. ***Scientific and Technological Education (Investment) Fund (Amendment) Act, 1998***
69. ***Fisheries and Foreshore (Amendment) Act, 1998***
70. ***British-Irish Agreement Act, 1999***
71. ***Finance Act, 1999***
72. ***Social Welfare Act, 1999***

73. ***Bretton Woods Agreements (Amendment) Act, 1999***
74. ***Postal and Telecommunications Services (Amendment) Act, 1999***
75. ***Irish Sports Council Act, 1999***
76. ***Local Elections (Disclosure of Donations and Expenditure) Act, 1999***
77. ***Companies (Amendment) Act, 1999***
78. ***Criminal Justice (Location of Victims' Remains) Act, 1999***
79. ***Criminal Justice Act, 1999***
80. ***Udaras na Gaeltachta (Amendment) Act, 1999***
81. ***Declaration under Article 29.7 of the Constitution (Extension of Time) Act, 1999***
82. ***Health (Eastern Regional Health Authority) Act, 1999***
83. ***National Disability Authority Act, 1999***
84. ***Road Transport Act, 1999***
85. ***Twentieth Amendment of the Constitution Act, 1999***
86. ***British-Irish Agreement (Amendment) Act, 1999***
87. ***Local Government (Planning and Development) Act, 1999***
88. ***Sea Pollution (Amendment) Act, 1999***
89. ***Architectural Heritage (National Inventory) and Historic Monuments (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 1999***
90. ***Regional Technical Colleges (Amendment) Act, 1999***
91. ***Minerals Development Act, 1999***
92. ***Immigration Act, 1999***
93. ***Electricity Regulation Act, 1999***
94. ***Horse and Greyhound Racing (Betting Charges and Levies) Act, 1999***
95. ***Courts (Supplemental Provisions) (Amendment) Act, 1999***
96. ***Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999***
97. ***Udaras na Gaeltachta (Amendment) (No.2) Act, 1999***

98. ***Broadcasting (Major Events Television Coverage) Act, 1999***
99. ***ICC Bank Act, 1999***
100. ***Companies (Amendment) (No.2) Act 1999***
101. ***Stamp Duties Consolidation Act, 1999***
102. ***Intoxicating Liquor Act, 1999***
103. ***Temporary Holding Fund for Superannuation Liabilities Act, 1999***
104. ***Appropriation Act, 1999***
105. ***Fisheries (Amendment) Act, 1999***
106. ***Comhairle Act, 2000***
107. ***National Beef Assurance Scheme Act, 2000***
108. ***Finance Act, 2000***
109. ***Social Welfare Act, 2000***
110. ***National Minimum Wage Act, 2000***
111. ***Local Government (Financial Provisions) Act, 2000***
112. ***Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse Act, 2000***
113. ***Equal Status Act, 2000***
114. ***Human Rights Commission Act, 2000***
115. ***Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (Amendment) Act, 2000***
116. ***Criminal Justice (United Nations Convention Against Torture) Act, 2000***
117. ***International Development Association (Amendment) Act, 2000***
118. ***Statute of Limitations (Amendment) Act, 2000***
119. ***Merchant Shipping (Investigation of Marine Casualties) Act, 2000***
120. ***Town Renewal Act, 2000***
121. ***Finance (No.2) Act, 2000***
122. ***Firearms (Firearm Certificates for Non-Residents) Act, 2000***
123. ***Harbours (Amendment) Act, 2000***
124. ***Education (Welfare) Act, 2000***

125. ***Hospitals' Trusts (1940) Limited (Payments to Former Employees) Act, 2000***
126. ***Medical Practitioners (Amendment) Act, 2000***
127. ***Local Government Act, 2000***
128. ***Gas (Amendment) Act, 2000***
129. ***Electronic Commerce Act, 2000***
130. ***Copyright and Related Rights Act, 2000***
131. ***Illegal Immigrants (Trafficking) Act, 2000***
132. ***Planning and Development Act, 2000***
133. ***Cement (Repeal of Enactments) Act, 2000***
134. ***ICC Bank Act, 2000***
135. ***National Pensions Reserve Fund Act, 2000***
136. ***Fisheries (Amendment) Act, 2000***
137. ***Irish Film Board (Amendment) Act, 2000***
138. ***Appropriation Act, 2000***
139. ***Protection of Children (Hague Convention) Act, 2000***
140. ***Wildlife Act, 2000***
141. ***National Treasury Management Agency (Amendment) Act, 2000***
142. ***National Stud (Amendment) Act, 2000***
143. ***National Training Fund Act, 2000***
144. ***Insurance Act, 2000***
145. ***Aviation Regulation Act, 2001***
146. ***Customs and Excise (Mutual Assistance) Act, 2001***
147. ***Diseases of Animals (Amendment) Act, 2001***
148. ***Broadcasting Act, 2001***
149. ***Social Welfare Act, 2001***
150. ***Trustee Savings Bank, Act 2001***
151. ***Finance Act, 2001***

152. ***Teaching Council Act, 2001***
153. ***Electricity (Supply) (Amendment) Act, 2001***
154. ***Housing (Gaeltacht) (Amendment) Act, 2001***
155. ***Industrial Relations Act, 2001***
156. ***ACC Bank Act, 2001***
157. ***Valuation Act, 2001***
158. ***Health (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 2001***
159. ***Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act, 2001***
160. ***Euro Changeover (Amounts) Act, 2001***
161. ***Health Insurance (Amendment) Act, 2001***
162. ***Sex Offenders Act, 2001***
163. ***Carer's Leave Act, 2001***
164. ***Horse and Greyhound Racing Act, 2001***
165. ***Nítrigin Éireann Teoranta Act, 2001***
166. ***Motor Vehicles (Duties and Licences) Act, 2001***
167. ***Vocational Education (Amendment) Act, 2001***
168. ***Children Act, 2001***
169. ***Mental Health Act, 2001***
170. ***Irish National Petroleum Corporation Ltd. Act, 2001***
171. ***Prevention of Corruption (Amendment) Act, 2001***
172. ***Company Law Enforcement Act, 2001***
173. ***Agriculture Appeals Act, 2001***
174. ***Oireachtas (Ministerial and Parliamentary Offices) (Amendment) Act,
2001***
175. ***Standards in Public Office Act, 2001***
176. ***Dormant Accounts Act, 2001***
177. ***Ministerial, Parliamentary and Judicial Offices and Oireachtas Members
(Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 2001***
178. ***Adventure Activities Standards Authority Act, 2001***
179. ***Human Rights Commission (Amendment) Act, 2001***