

Contents

Introduction by Bertie Ahern, leader of Fianna Fáil
Prudently managing the economy for sustainable growth
Winning the country back for our people
 Crime
 Drugs
 An inclusive society
 Institutional reform
 Healthcare
 The family and women's rights
 Housing
Revitalising the fabric of our nation
 Education
 Sport and leisure
 Rural development
 Transport
 Roads
 Energy
Fuelling the engines of growth
 Information age
 Enterprise
 Tourism
Agriculture, food and forestry
 Marine
 Semi-state sector
Preserving and extending our inheritance
 Environment
 Arts, heritage, culture
Polasai I leith na Gaeilge agus pobal na Gaeilge
Strengthening Ireland's place in the world
 Northern Ireland
 International affairs
 Defence

Appendices

Introduction by the leader of Fianna Fáil, Bertie Ahern - TD

The choice before Ireland

Is cœis mh-r br-id domsa mar cheannaire Fhianna Fáil an cháipis seo a sheoladh le cur os comhair an phobail. Tá dian-mhacnamh džanta ag Fianna Fáil ar na cœiseanna m-ra buartha I mbžal an phobail agus ar an sort nđisicœin ar mhaith leo sa todhcha' anseo in žirinn. Bhuna'omar đr gcuid polasaithe ar na cœraim agus ar na hidžil sin, agus ba mh-r linn iad a chur I gcr'ch.

Every election is important to the people, but this election is important as never before.

For rarely has Ireland faced such a critical range of opportunities and threats. In the next five years, we have the choice of realising those opportunities or succumbing to those threats. The choice before the people is as stark as that.

Economically, we now have the opportunity to build on the current wave of success, laying solid foundations for a prosperous Ireland in the 21st century as a viable member of European monetary union and an effective player in an enlarged Europe. Or we can squander the benefits of our present position, condemning the future Ireland to be an also-ran always in need of support in a world much less ready to give it.

Five years on, we will no longer have this choice. Socially, we now have the opportunity to act decisively on the cancer of crime by enforcing our laws effectively and even more importantly, by removing for ever the disadvantage in our society that gives rise to much of it.

Or we can watch helplessly while lawlessness takes over our country, and the gap grows wider between the haves and have-nots. Five years on, we will no longer have this choice.

Technologically, we now have the opportunity to catapult Ireland to the front rank of the information age, where we can for the first time in history use our strengths to full advantage in an environment where our historical weaknesses need no longer matter.

Or we can be just onlookers in this latest revolution, doing too little too late and condemning ourselves and our children to second-division status in the new millennium.

Five years on, we will no longer have that choice.

Politically, we have the opportunity to restore the peoples confidence in the process of government involving them in it as never before, making the administration of government genuinely responsive to their needs, and frankly addressing the demand to eradicate all unethical conduct from public life.

Or we can go on as before, fiddling with details while ignoring the real problems that are causing people to lose confidence in our democratic process.

Five years on, we will no longer have that choice.

In regard to the Northern Ireland problem, we now have a new opportunity to build on the hope created by the peace process redoubling our energies in the face of the obstacles that have been put in its path. Or we can retreat to the sterile attitudes of the past 30 years, and condemn the whole of this island to a future that stunts its potential and perpetuates violence and injustice.

Five years on, we will no longer have that choice.

The choice now before the people is to decide which government is more likely to build on these opportunities, and which government is more likely to succumb to these threats.

Since becoming leader of Fianna Fáil two and a half years ago, I have travelled up and down the country listening to people. What struck me most forcibly was how out of touch the rainbow government are with the people's real concerns. They kept their heads down, relentlessly pursuing policies that they thought would impress the electorate rather than implementing policies the country needed.

The people could clearly see that the economic boom was not being used to cure our economic problems, but for short-term gains that would cost us dear later on.

The people could clearly see that crime was getting out of hand, spurred on by the rapidly worsening position on drugs.

The people could clearly see that the plight of the disadvantaged was beginning to tear apart the fabric of our society.

The people could clearly see that the world was going through another industrial revolution, bringing in the information age, and that we were not preparing properly for it.

The people could clearly see that the political process was not focused on their needs.

The people could clearly see that a priceless opportunity for peace in northern Ireland was being let slip through our fingers.

Meanwhile, the rainbow government could see none of these things. The result was a largely wasted two and a half years. Time and again, the government took vital action only when prodded to by Fianna Fáil, and when we gave them the ideas and draft legislation to do it.

This manifesto is Fianna Fáil's response to the needs of the Irish people today. In a real sense, it is the people's manifesto. It is a recipe for grasping the opportunities that are before

Ireland now has a once-off chance for us to affect our destiny decisively for the 21st century. It is a programme that people know Fianna Fáil can deliver. And with the people's support, we will deliver it.

Bertie Ahern

Prudently managing the economy for sustainable growth

Fianna Fáil in government will:

make prudent management of our national finances the overriding policy objective of government, as the best way to sustain a better life for all in the challenging times ahead.

Put a ceiling on the absolute level of the national debt, and then start progressively reducing it.

RUN a current surplus each year and in favourable circumstances eliminate the exchequer borrowing requirement altogether.

Keep strictly to the targets we set for public spending, which will steadily decline as a proportion of national output.

Pay for lower taxes and better public services out of the dividend from this prudent, forward-looking economic strategy.

Challenges we must prepare for :

Fianna Fáil believe it is vital that Ireland is able to join the first phase of economic and monetary union. EMU has potentially great benefits for the nation, especially in lower interest rates and business costs. But at the same time it brings with it major challenges.

Maintaining and improving our competitiveness, especially if Britain stays out of EMU, is critical. Also vital is the need for financial spare capacity so we can respond to any short-term crises without infringing the strict conditions of the European stability pact.

To protect our present growth within the much more demanding regime of EMU, we must strengthen the resilience of our economy now.

This is no time to lower our guard, as has been happening systematically under the loose-spending rainbow government.

We need economic strength also to respond pro-actively to the opportunities of a world marketplace that is changing fast.

Ireland must position itself aggressively in the forefront of the information age. We must carve out market positions for this country in the eastern markets which will be the economic pivot of the 21st century.

Danger signals from the rainbow government:

despite the present high growth, Ireland's competitiveness and the future strength of our economy is seriously threatened by:

a national debt that has now passed £30 billion, and if present policies are not changed will be over £32 billion by 1999. The £2.5 billion annual cost of servicing this debt (over half the entire take from income tax) is the main barrier to lower taxes and better public services.

Public spending that has been let get out of control. Under the rainbow government, spending has leapt by over a fifth more than three times the rate of inflation. This government have recklessly failed to meet even their own undemanding targets for containing spending, overshooting by £600 million of taxpayers' money.

Unemployment that still runs at a quarter of a million way above the EU average.

Higher personal tax than in most other countries, especially for people on low and medium incomes. Uncompetitive tax rates throttle job creation and reduce Ireland's attraction as a location for inward investment.

Enterprise development that has been inhibited by the inconsistent attitude of a government which lacks a strong pro-enterprise attitude.

Public services that in many cases still need modernisation and investment, and which are reeling from the short-sighted, procrastinating and destructive approach to the state sector taken by the rainbow government.

Fianna Fáil's track record in prudent management

Fianna Fáil's ability to manage the national finances prudently is well proven.

Over the past decade our consistent policy has been to lay firm foundations for future growth, and at the same time improve vital services and bring down taxes by controlling costs and increasing efficiency.

In 1987 we created the ground-breaking social partnership which became the framework for carefully-managed growth. Between 1987 and 1990, we cut government spending from 53% of national output to 38%. We set demanding cost limits, and performed even better than we promised. We negotiated unprecedented increases in EU funding in 1989 and 1993, and even more important put those funds to productive work through far-sighted investment.

Fianna Fáil's strategy protected our economy during the world recession that began in 1990, made it possible for us to meet the Maastricht guidelines, and set the scene for the present remarkable growth which the rainbow coalition inherited and has been largely squandering for short-term gain.

The pay-off from Fianna Fáil's prudence was our ability to reduce the tax burden out of the benefits the strategy produced.

During our last period in government, Fianna Fáil cut

the standard rate of income tax from 35% to 27%

the top rate from 58% to 48%

the standard rate of vat from 25% to 21%

corporation tax from 43% to 40%.

These, along with a wide range of other reliefs, reduced the tax burden by just under one billion pounds (£960 million). In 1994 alone, Bertie Ahern as minister for finance lowered taxes by £333 million, 60% more than Ruairi Quinn could manage the following year. Despite this year's election budget, the rainbow government's policy has clearly been to raise spending rather than to lower taxes, while worsening the overall state of the national finances.

Fianna Fáil's proven policy, in contrast, is to contain spending and to fund growth-stimulating tax cuts out of what can be prudently afforded.

The national debt - a burden too far

the national debt now stands at over £30 billion. Only 25 years ago, it was a little over £1 billion. Nowadays we spend more than double that each year just to service the debt.

Since the Fianna Fáil budgets of 1987-9, the national debt has declined steeply relative to national output from 125% of GNP in 1987 to 90% now. But in absolute terms the total debt continues to climb, with between £500m and £1 billion added nearly every year. Some 15% of all current spending, equivalent to 56% of income tax revenue in 1996, still goes simply on servicing the national debt.

Fianna Fáil, in the interests of the nation's future economic stability and prosperity, will set a ceiling on the national debt.

Fianna Fáil make a further commitment: once we have eliminated further borrowing, we will adopt a deliberate policy of paying off the national debt. Each year we will assess and report publicly on the opportunities for doing this. Any budget surplus will be used mainly to reduce the national debt. Some of the reductions in current spending resulting from a falling national debt will be used to lower the tax burden.

Time to balance the budget

Bertie Ahern as minister for finance in 1994 produced the first current budget surplus for more than a quarter century. Under the rainbow government this slid back into deficit in 1995, before returning to surplus in 1996.

Fianna Fáil will ensure that, barring serious recession, there will be no further current budget deficit. Indeed, in order to finance any necessary capital borrowing while still meeting the Maastricht targets, our aim is to run a substantial and increasing current budget surplus in the years ahead.

Fianna Fáil will further seek to eliminate the exchequer borrowing requirement (EBR) altogether, as recommended by the ESRI.

The ebr has been targeted at between £600m and £750m for several years, but the 1996 outturn of £437m and revenue buoyancy this year shows that it could be eliminated without undue strain.

Bringing costs back under control

growth in public spending must to be kept on a tight rein, if the economy is to continue growing, inflation to stay under control, and if we are to sharpen further our competitiveness.

Fianna Fáil will keep public spending below 40% of GNP and on a steadily declining trend, assuming normal growth conditions.

We will limit the annual growth in net current spending (post-budget), including debt servicing, to 4%, until exchequer borrowing is eliminated. Assuming inflation of around 2%, this limit could still allow a real annual rise in spending on services of around 2%.

We will limit growth in exchequer capital spending to 5% a year, until the current budget surplus is equal to and can offset exchequer borrowing for capital purposes.

We will deliver better value for money in public spending, while responding to the justified public demand for an improved quality of services especially in health, education, welfare, law and order, and roads.

Fianna Fáil are deeply committed to social partnership in a hands-on way, and will fulfil the terms of programme 2000.

A fairer deal on tax

Fianna Fáil aim to recreate the low-tax economy that we had until the late 1960s, while maintaining and improving necessary public services. Creating such an economy is the best way of stimulating new jobs and sustaining existing ones.

Our goal is not just to reform the tax system for its own sake, but to use tax reform to reduce the tax burden. We believe Irish people at all levels of income must be able to take home as much of their pay as people do in other neighbouring countries.

Fianna Fáil will honour fully all the tax commitments in programme 2000. Where possible, we will do better during the lifetime of the programme and beyond.

Fianna Fáil's eight key priorities for reducing the tax burden over the next five years, as resources become available, are:

a new, introductory tax rate of 20%.we intend this mainly to redress the high proportion of wages taken in tax from young people entering the workforce. We will progressively extend the scope of this rate so that it will become the standard rate.

Broader tax bands, with the target that 80% of total income is taxed at the standard rate.

A lower ceiling on the combined marginal rate for all deductions (income tax, levies, and PRSI) of no more than 50%. (At present, the top combined rate is 56%.) our further objective is to lower the combined marginal rate below 50%, over time.

As part of this strategy, our target will be to get the top rate of tax down from 48% to 43%.

Tax relief at the standard rate of up to £2,000 initially, for vouched spending on registered child-minders (including crèches and pre-schools), and on caring for the aged or handicapped.

Tax relief at the standard rate on up to £2,000 initially, as recognition for married people who stay at home to care for their children (and who do not get any state benefit other than child benefit). This will be payable as a refund, directly to the person at home.

Higher tax-free allowances for old-age pensioners beginning with those over 75 and in time extending to all over 70.

People living in the republic but working in Northern Ireland, often at lower rates of pay, will pay no more tax on that income than they would if they were living in the north.

We are confident progress towards these objectives can be achieved by steady and consistent action over several budgets.

Getting our priorities right

because we believe that a sound economy is the essential foundation for everything we wish to do, all policies and commitments in this Fianna Fáil manifesto are subject to meeting the borrowing and public spending targets set out here, and the absolute requirement to stay within the maastricht criteria at all times.

Winning the country
back for our people

winning the war against crime

mobilising the country against drugs
making an all-out assault on disadvantage
bringing government closer to the people
delivering on priorities in healthcare
supporting the family and the rights of women
improving housing prospects for all

law enforcement
winning the war against crime

Fianna Fáil in government will

give priority to a broadly-based war against crime

develop a long-term national strategy on crime through a white paper process

adopt a zero tolerance policy on all crime

strengthen the Gardaí with the right resources and structures, increasing the force by 1,200 to its full complement

speed up the courts system

expand the number of prison places by 2,000

a dramatically worsening crime situation

in the lifetime of the rainbow government, a mere two and a half years, crime in Ireland has become dramatically worse.

So-called petty crime has mushroomed, much of it unreported and most of it undetected and unpunished. Alongside this we have seen an alarming growth in serious violent crime, most of it drugs-related. Organised crime, once something we knew only through fiction and film, has suddenly emerged as a vicious

reality in Irish society. Crime threatens us on our streets, in our homes, and in our businesses.

Fianna Fáil saw this coming. The rainbow government did not. Though we were in opposition, Fianna Fáil put forward measures to deal with the threat: we proposed 13 criminal justice bills since the beginning of 1995. No fewer than three of these bills are now the law of the land, hastily adopted by the rainbow government when it eventually saw sense. Because of us, the bail laws are now reformed. Because of us, the state can now pursue the illicit assets of criminals.

Fianna Fáil believe the present crime threat is not just a worsening of something that has always been with us. The threat we face now is different in kind: it poses a major threat to the fabric of our society.

The next government has a brief opportunity to win control of the situation, before it is too late. We still have it within our power to arrest the growth of crime, and roll it back. Unless we act effectively now, we will have a very different and unpleasant Ireland in five years' time and it will be five years too late, because we will have lost the opportunity which must be grasped now.

Fianna Fáil will make a broadly-based war on crime a central priority of our first years in government. Our strategy is to fight each and every crime through effective law enforcement, while at the same time attacking the root causes of crime that arise through social deprivation.

From panic measures to a proper strategy

the impact of Fianna Fáil's presence in government will be felt at once. However, one of the biggest needs is to replace the present government's ad hoc approach to the crisis with a carefully thought-out strategy that has the support of everybody. In our first year in government, Fianna Fáil will develop a white paper on crime. All relevant official agencies, such as the Gardaí and the prison and probation services as well as representatives of the legal profession, the judiciary and victim support, will be consulted. We will also involve community and local drugs awareness groups in this consultative process, inviting submissions on the nature of crime in Ireland today and on how it could be managed.

We will draw on these submissions to publish a comprehensive white paper setting out government decisions on long-term strategy.

Zero tolerance - no crime, and no victim of crime, is unimportant

given the threat the nation faces, it is important that the government's attitude to crime is clear-cut. In Fianna Fáil's view, there are no insignificant crimes today. And, most certainly, there are no unimportant victims which is why we will fully implement the charter for the victims of crime which we published in 1996.

Fianna Fáil in government will operate a strategy of zero tolerance, an approach that has produced impressive results elsewhere.

This reflects the following principles:

no crime, no matter how small, is insignificant;

there is a definite connection between lesser and more serious crimes;

tolerance of small crimes creates a climate where big crimes flourish;

certain crimes will not be overlooked because they are not important,

toleration of lesser crimes sends the wrong message to the law-abiding citizen that the Gardaí and the government are ineffective.

Accordingly, we will overlook no crimes because they are not perceived to be important. Zero tolerance means implementing the law of the land as it stands.

Backing the Gardaí with the right resources and structures

Fianna Fáil in government will give much greater operational control to the Gardaí on day-to-day management and for the effective achievement of agreed objectives.

We will end the interventionist role which the department of justice has traditionally exercised.

The Gardaí will be assigned agreed objectives such as targeted annual reductions in crime and increases in detection rates. They will have a high degree of internal autonomy and discretion in deploying personnel and other resources to achieve these objectives. We will redefine the reporting and accountability relationships between the minister and the commissioner.

Fianna Fáil will increase garda numbers by 1,200 from the current strength of 10,800 to the full complement of 12,000. We will reverse the policy of the rainbow government and replace garda numbers depleted by resignation, death, or retirement. We will abolish the upper age-limit, currently at 26 years, for recruits.

We will withdraw Gardaí from routine civilian work and traffic duties, and give these duties to local authorities. This will allow more Gardaí to staff specialist units and to return to the beat. We will recruit professional people to staff accounting and other expert administrative offices within the Gardaí.

We will reassess the proposed garda performance development & review system. As it is, it is too limited and clearly shows that it was developed without input from the garda rank-and-file.

Fianna Fáil believe there is a need for a review of the Gardaí, to identify the changes required to make the force fully responsive to the needs of modern

society. The last major review of garda organisation was nearly 20 years ago, and only parts of that report were implemented. Any review, to be successful, must include representatives of the Gardaí at all levels.

Speeding up the courts

current court procedures are cumbersome and slow, with cases taking up to 18 months to process. Fianna Fáil believe they should be cleared in three months, and we will create a fast-track prosecution system to make this possible. Such a system is in the interests of both defence and prosecution.

Fianna Fáil will:

abolish the system of preliminary examination. Instead, at the first appearance, it will be ascertained whether the matter should be dealt with on indictment. If so, it will be referred directly to the court of trial.

Reorganise the court calendar.

Remove the necessity of oral evidence from purely formal witnesses.

Create a statutory basis for plea-bargaining, and set up a witness protection programme.

Fianna Fáil will also act decisively to deal with the more than 7,000 unexecuted arrest warrants in the country. These represent a tremendous opportunity to help reduce crime, an opportunity ignored by the rainbow government.

Making our courts more effective and efficient will take resources, both in personnel and in the upgrading of buildings. This is a price that we believe can no longer be postponed.

Expanding the number of prison places

prisoners are being now released early because of the lack of cell space. This sends out all the wrong signals. It tells hardened prisoners that truth in sentencing is a joke. It tells potential criminals that, even if they are apprehended, not much will happen to them. It tells the public that the system is not working and cannot guarantee them fundamental security.

Fianna Fáil have a clear and unequivocal prisons policy. We are committed to providing sufficient prison places, to modernising prison conditions, and to eliminating overcrowding.

We believe that, when it comes to new prison construction, money must never be the deciding issue. Citizen protection from criminals is paramount. We will also severely restrict temporary release.

Fianna Fáil will provide 2,000 additional prison places, 1,000 of them in the first two years of government.

We will embark on an extensive prison building programme..

We will begin construction of a new remand centre at wheatfield prison.

We will set up separate drugs treatment detention units. For the drug addict, the choice will be clear: treatment or prison.

We will also consider innovative building proposals such as private-sector financing and the innovative use of sites and buildings.

Fianna Fáil will set up a prisons authority, with overall responsibility for the prisons system. We will also create an independent inspectorate of prisons with powers to interview prisoners and, on appeal, hear their grievances. The inspectorate will also hear the grievances of prison officers, hold enquiries, examine conditions, and recommend reforms. Fianna Fáil will allocate increased resources to a well-trained, well equipped, professional force of prison officers. This will go a long way to reduce prison violence and especially in reducing drug use and abuse by prisoners within prison walls.

Mobilising the country against drugs

Fianna Fáil in government will

adopt a preventative approach to the drugs problem rather than passively accept the inevitability of its continued growth

co-ordinate a national drugs strategy through a cabinet sub-committee and a minister of state for drugs

use the justice system imaginatively by creating a drug court system as an alternative to the present revolving door approach

offer nationwide rehabilitation services for addicts, and link rehabilitation to employment

be tough and uncompromising towards drug pedlars and pushers

encourage our European partners towards more effective co-operation against the drugs trade

mobilising the nation against drugs

up to 80% of all crime in dublin is related to drugs. Solutions must deal with

the suppliers, the pushers and the addicts, and with the need to protect our communities from the awful influences of the drugs culture.

As we stress in our position paper, a radical approach to drugs and drug related crime, the Fianna Fáil strategy for drugs and drug related crime is firmly based on a philosophy of prevention - detoxification - rehabilitation - employment.

We will, as a priority, invest in a preventative approach rather than accept the inevitability of continuing record levels of drug abuse and addiction.

Fianna Fáil in government will give priority to investment in educating our youth to combat drugs, to detoxification and rehabilitation measures and, for the first time, will link rehabilitated addicts to job training and placement.

By introducing a drug court programme, we will use the justice system in an imaginative way to rehabilitate addicts charged with non-violent offences and reduce the prison revolving door for drug addicts. Addicts charged with non-violent offences will be offered a choice of proceeding to trial or participating in a court-supervised strict treatment and rehabilitation regime under the drug court programme.

An independent national drugs commission will be set up to monitor the implementation and success of the drugs strategy and to oversee a continuous research programme to underpin it.

Prevention and awareness

Fianna Fáil will co-ordinate the work of all relevant government departments in a cabinet sub-committee. We will appoint a minister of state whose specific brief will be to address the drugs culture and other justice matters that straddle the departments of justice, education and health.

We will appoint a national drugs education co-ordinator, area drugs education co-ordinators at local level, and posts of responsibility in second level schools to promote the school related elements of the national drug strategy.

In each health board, Fianna Fáil will set up a special committee whose task will be to enhance existing programmes and to translate the work of the cabinet sub-committee to the local and community level.

Fianna Fáil believe that any policy of prevention must begin with the people who are closest to those at risk: the parents and the teachers.

More relevant advisory programmes on drugs will be developed in the schools. These will aim to integrate the efforts of teachers, parents, psychologists, the health boards, local community and sports organisations, and community care.

We will reinforce the efforts of local and national bodies with an intensive

anti-drugs media campaign.

Rehabilitation

Fianna Fáil will establish a national hotline centre, properly resourced and staffed on a 24 hour basis. The 1-800 number will be available to parents, young people, schools and everyone seeking guidance and advice.

We will offer out-patient detoxification within a maximum waiting period of 2 weeks. For those who successfully undergo detox as out-patients, coun-selling will be provided for a period of 6 months or as clinical needs dictate.

We will substantially increase in-patient detoxification facilities provided by health boards. In the first phase, we will increase fourfold the number of beds from the current national level of about 25 to 100. Once this level is reached, we will examine the need for more provision.

We will contribute financially to the provision of additional in-patient detox facilities by private initiatives. In the first phase, we will create 50 extra residential places servicing post-detoxification counselling needs.

We will, in addition to detoxification, provide methadone maintenance for patients who are stabilised. This provision will be linked to counselling towards detoxification. Methadone maintenance will not be available for a period of longer than 5 years without consideration of the necessity of it. We will establish a register of addicts receiving methadone maintenance which will be made accessible to pharmacists who may be issuing prescriptions for methadone.

We recognise that there may be a place for mobile clinics, but believe they must be linked to the provision of on-going counselling.

We will give priority access to in-patient detox beds to mothers willing to be detoxified during pregnancy. We will provide beds for cases of mother and baby detoxification in maternity units or in an in-patient detoxification unit.

We believe that full treatment should be available for drug addicts in prison. We will create a drug-free treatment unit which could be purpose built or converted from existing facilities.

We will expand the number of consultant psychiatrists to meet the needs of the large number of drug addicts. Additional personnel such as junior doctors, social workers and counsellors will also be provided.

We believe that studies of the prevalence of all types of drug mis-use are essential if services are to be tailored to meet the needs of addicts. Our independent national commission on drug abuse will be responsible for organising this research.

From rehabilitation to employment

Fianna Fáil will link the full range of state training and job placement services to the national drugs policy, so that a person who comes out of detox or rehabilitation will be offered a constructive route for the development of his career and life after drugs.

We will ensure that local employment services develop special arrangements to assist recovering drug addicts coming from detox or rehab services and who want to get a job. We will allocate training and community employment places to recovering addicts.

We will strongly encourage and support, with a contribution towards capital funding and operational expenses, training and employment initiatives for recovering drug addicts within a business-like company or co-operative structure.

Trafficking in drugs

against drug pedlars and pushers, Fianna Fáil will be tough and uncompromising. We will:

bring in mandatory 10-year minimum sentences for those caught in possession of controlled drugs with a street value of over £10,000.

Legislate to permit the immediate suspension or forfeiture of the licence of any premises pub, club, or disco where controlled drugs are distributed, replacing the rushed and inadequate measure introduced in this area by the rainbow government.

Streamline the courts system to ensure that the trial of drug-dealing offences will take place within 90 days of arrest.

Confiscate the profits of the drugs barons, using the full powers now available through the Fianna Fáil-initiated legislation on illicit assets.

Set up an undercover unit for drugs detection.

Dedicate more garda resources to combating drug trafficking.

Be a prime mover in encouraging our European partners towards greater co-operation on drugs and organised crime.

Making an all-out assault on disadvantage

Fianna Fáil in government will

bring new urgency, new resources and new ideas to attack the problem of disadvantage

build strong communities, in partnership with local people and

voluntary organisations

target specific resources to disadvantage, and monitor effectiveness

create a comprehensive, nationwide programme to help people who are long-term unemployed get back to work

reorganise and refocus the social welfare system, permitting us to extend the caring society

accelerate action concerning people with disabilities

create a new deal for the travelling community

attack fraud and abuse in social welfare, freeing up resources to address real needs

tackling disadvantage the time is now

Fianna Fáil believe that disadvantage in our society can no longer be tolerated. Irish people want prosperity, but not at the expense of those who are genuinely in need or disadvantaged. Neither do Irish people want a society that is at war with itself, because of growing gaps between the ôhavesi and ôhave notsi. As we approach the new millennium, we must plan to meet the urgent needs of our changing society.

Even in bad times, Fianna Fáil have always made extra provision for those in need. Now that better times have arrived, we have the opportunity to address the outstanding needs of those who still do not benefit from our new prosperity. Fianna Fáil believe it is vital to grasp that opportunity in the lifetime of the next government.

Building strong communities through partnership

strong well-developed communities provide better opportunities for children and other family members, while enabling the people as well as the local economy to grow more free of crime.

Fianna Fáil initiated almost all the present supports for community development and partnership groups, women, men and family groups and local development projects.

These have been successful, but they are only a first step. It is now time to invest more in the parish and the community, so as to make equality of opportunity a reality for all.

Fianna Fáil will

create an intensive support plan for parishes and communities in disadvantaged areas. The state will enter into partnership with them to help build strong

local communities, providing resources necessary for investment. This will include extending the life-span of the local area partnership companies created by Fianna Fáil into the new millennium, through a combination of EU funding and national resources. The local area partnerships have demonstrated their effectiveness and responsiveness to local community needs and will have a special role in reaching out to those excluded from the workforce, whether on the live register or not.

Award community contracts to develop recreational, sporting, educational and developmental activities on a parish and community basis. This will be done in partnership with national agencies such as the national community games, the gaa, the fai and amatEur leagues, the scouting movement, and the society of st. Vincent de paul. The work these organisations do at local level is a cornerstone of our society, but it is not given adequate recognition or scope. Fianna Fáil will give that recognition and the extra resources to make a real difference in areas of greatest need.

Develop specialised investment programmes for women's groups, men's groups, and family support groups. We will provide family support for:

toddlers, involving parents with children;

under 5 year olds, where child

nurseries and courses in parent development are needed;

5-12 year olds, who need special support in school and the community; teenagers, who need counselling, support, involvement, direction and parenting.

We will give unemployed spouses special incentives to take part in their own parish and community

development plan. Fathers on the dole will have a special part to play in

building a future with real opportunities for the children of their area. We

will continue to develop child benefit as a key support for every child in the state and increase the payment to mothers of twins.

Target specific resources on disadvantage, and monitor effectiveness

when resources are diffused and dispersed their effectiveness is diluted, and monitoring their effectiveness is more difficult. Fianna Fáil will target 0.5% of the entire social welfare estimate, in a stringently accountable manner, towards additional projects aimed at eliminating disadvantage. These projects, which will cut across the boundaries of government departments as necessary, include:

re-training and career-oriented adult education, especially for people who are long-term unemployed. Fianna Fáil believe that real progress in eliminating poverty can only be made by placing people in jobs.

Drug prevention and rehabilitation initiatives.

A decisive attack on the growing problem of homelessness, which in many ways is the most profound manifestation of poverty.

Improved services to tackle domestic violence and its dire consequences, especially for women and children.

Funding contracts with voluntary groups to provide recreational, sporting, educational and developmental activities.

Helping people who are long-term unemployed get back to work

Fianna Fáil will put in place a nationwide programme to tackle long-term unemployment. The elements will include:

a 25,000-place programme to tackle long-term unemployment which will pay the going rate for the job. It will be rUN on the same basis as the programme operated by the conference of religious (cori).

Second chance education;

expanding the job-facilitator programme and the local employment service, to help unemployed people avail of back-to-work options;

extending the prsi exemption scheme;

a tax allowance for long-term unemployed people who move into employment, and double tax deductions for their employer;

wide-scale use of community employment schemes; we will also allocate up to 10% of community employment and training options to women in the home, including widows on the social welfare insurance pension and women on deserted wives benefit;

a programme to enable long-term unemployed people to work with voluntary and community organisations;

a strong family dimension in schemes encouraging unemployed people and their spouses to return to work, to strengthen the position of both parents as role models for their children;

extending the family income supplement, over time, to self-employed people;

setting up a home to business register which will allow anyone working full-time at home for a specific period to qualify for state training programmes and to be recognised as contributors to economic well-being;

introducing a minimum wage; following similar moves in Britain, Fianna Fáil will introduce a minimum wage to prevent exploitation in low-paid hourly employment, especially of young people and women.

Reorganising and refocusing the social welfare system

Fianna Fáil will carry out a root-and-branch reorganisation of the department of social welfare, so that it plays the most effective role possible in supporting people, families and communities.

We will create a new board to supervise the financing and operation of the social insurance fund. This fund is the workers' guarantee that their benefits will be there for them when needed, without interference or means testing. Board members will include representatives of employers, employees, self-employed people, retired people and other interested groups. An actuarial assessment of the fund and its future needs will be placed before *dáil fireann* at least every three years.

We will enhance the role of community, voluntary and family groups in our society, developing their partnership with the statutory agencies and supporting them through properly-funded 3-year plans.

We will greatly improve the information network for customers and create additional customer panels to maintain direct contact with particular groups.

We will reform payment systems to put the needs of social welfare customers first, and make assistance and advice on budgeting much more widely available.

We will assess the adequacy in today's circumstances of all agencies which carry out the work of the department.

We will rename the department as the department of social, community and family affairs to reflect its wider role in the new millennium. We will appoint a minister of state for family affairs. The new family focus in social welfare is designed to put families at the heart of our policy-making. It will provide a focal point through which we can monitor the outcome of social policies as they affect families.

A better deal for women and older people

Fianna Fáil will introduce further improvements to meet the needs of women and older people. These will include:

ensuring the social welfare provisions not only keep pace with inflation, but that our pensioners share in our economic growth.

Raising, over three years, the personal rates of pensions for widows and widowers over 66 to the rate of the old age contributory pension.

Ensuring that by the new millennium all women will have an opportunity to get an occupational pension. In 1994, Fianna Fáil recognised the time spent by mothers caring for children, an older person or a person with a disability. Fianna Fáil also brought self-employed women, and the spouses of self-employed people, into old age and survivors' pensions.

Providing pensions in their own right to women in the home who are dependant, and making flexible arrangements to meet the changing needs of women. Providing social insurance credits to women caring for children, older people or those with disabilities, and to women who work on a voluntary basis in their local community.

Providing for a system of voluntary contributions for women in the home.

Ensuring that Ireland takes the lead in providing adequate pensions for part-time workers, mainly women, who do not have occupational pensions at present.

Making new arrangements to tackle the problems faced by people who were marginally excluded from participation in prsi pensions.

Tackling fraud and abuse in social welfare

abuse of the social welfare system is a particularly serious fraud, since it reduces our ability to cater for real need. Fianna Fáil will attack fraud and abuse in an integrated and consistent way, in contrast to the behaviour of the present minister for social welfare who first denied there was a problem at all, and is now claiming credit for falls in the live register following his belated action.

We will

use fully the enhanced information technology system and our overall review of the department to extract quality information on the potential for fraud within each programme;

make technical changes, where necessary, to reduce the vulnerability to abuse of each programme;

assess the adequacy of current penalties for abuse, and examine the potential for a higher level of deterrence;

quantify savings which can be achieved from better fraud detection and prevention;

closely co-operate with fcs and other state agencies on the provision of work options and jobs.

Accelerating action concerning people with disabilities

Fianna Fáil will give priority to action on issues of concern to people with disabilities and their families. There is a clear need to promote individual choice and ensure the achievement of individual potential, through a system of individual empowerment coupled with consultation.

It is important that we demedicalise social issues such as disability. Access to services will become part of the remit of all state agencies. We will foster innovation in service provision, policy development and representation.

Fianna Fáil will continue to support the development of equality legislation for people with disabilities. We also support the introduction of disability

proofing legislation, and will work to ensure that the importance of action on disability is explicitly recognised in European union treaties.

Where services are provided by or through non-governmental organisations, we will create a more stable funding environment with transparent procedures, multi-annual contracts and recognition of the need to support core staff and activity costs.

We will act on the evidence suggesting that many children with disabilities would benefit from enrolment in mainstream schools if provided with accessible facilities and some additional support.

We will also aim to ensure that children with disabilities have the same opportunity as other children to participate in pre-school education.

We will undertake a complete review of the provision of vocational training for people with disabilities, and ensure that a range of employment options suited to individual needs are available.

We will overhaul the means by which the state supports the incomes of people with disabilities and reduce unnecessary bureaucracy in dealing with health agencies.

The objective of our housing policy for people with disabilities will be to ensure the availability of a range of options including adapted private housing, supported independent living units, sheltered housing and full care residential units. We will provide personal assistance for independent living.

We will introduce a coordinated and comprehensive approach to promoting access by people with disabilities to the use of public spaces and facilities, and to the whole of the transport chain.

A new deal for the travelling community

it is estimated that a total of 3,100 additional units of accommodation is needed by the year 2000 if all travellers requiring accommodation are to be facilitated. There are now about 1,125 families living on the side of the road with nowhere to go, often in appalling and dangerous conditions.

Fianna Fáil believe that the time has now come for the community to come to grips with the problems involved in fully integrating the travelling community within the fabric of our society.

To overcome years of discrimination, neglect and indifference, Fianna Fáil will ensure that all recommendations of the task force on the travelling community will be fully implemented within five years.

We will assign a minister of state sole responsibility for co-ordinating the policy implementation, especially to ensure that each government department meets the specific implementation objectives each year in their areas of responsibility.

We will lay before the Dáil each year a report on the progress made on the 5-year implementation programme.

Continuing the caring tradition

today more than ever, social welfare has a pivotal role in maintaining social cohesion in our society. Fianna Fáil have a proud record in improving support for those who are least able to provide for themselves.

Most of the innovative measures which are part of our provisions today were created by Fianna Fáil. These range from free travel for older people and people with disabilities to the carer's allowance, the back-to-work allowance, second-chance education for unemployed people, and support for the many women's groups, community projects and voluntary services.

Much has been achieved, particularly in the last ten years. The nation now spends £4.5 billion each year on social welfare.

Many of the targets set by the commission on social welfare have already been met.

Equally, however, we must acknowledge that many of the current rates of social welfare are only enough to provide a minimal standard of living for recipients and their families. Fianna Fáil believe there is no room for either complacency or begrudgery when evaluating current levels of social welfare payments.

People whose needs are greatest include the long-term unemployed, older people, widows, families and especially larger families, homeless people, people with disabilities and carers.

As further improvements, we will:

provide a 3-month bereavement allowance during the first year of bereavement, where a person is in receipt of a social welfare benefit or assistance payment, and either that person or an adult dependant dies;

extend nationwide the higher rate of free fuel allowance and include those in receipt of the new sickness allowance at the long-term rate;

ease and simplify the means test for smallholders and fishermen; give widows, old-age and invalidity pensioners and people on disability allowances similar beneficial means allowances as to lone parents; review the assessment of savings and interest charges, and encourage special savings accounts of up to £10,000 which will not be subject to means testing, in the interests of security for older people; extend the carer's allowance to include those who care for people with a severe disability.

Fianna Fáil will achieve the balance needed to meet our vision of increasing prosperity for everyone without exception.

Bringing government closer to the people

Fianna Fáil in government will

focus public administration on the needs of the customer

revitalise the public service through best-practice management

create a system of real local government for the first time

make the oireachtas more relevant to the everyday concerns of citizens

extend the vote to emigrants

restore public confidence in politics through a credible policing mechanism for ethical issues

focusing public administration on the customer

Fianna Fáil will make public administration more relevant to the life of the citizen, for whom the service exists.

Public offices. We will improve physical access to public offices and upgrade their environment, and increase availability of services through staggered or extended opening hours. We will make things easier for the public through better sign-posting of services, one-stop shops for all government services, and reciprocal case handling arrangements. We will upgrade staff training in skills relating to dealing with customers.

Official communications. We will make official communications more accessible. Staff will be trained to use simple language; we will make more understandable the language in legal texts; communications will be personalised and response times to enquiries will be controlled and minimised. A form audit unit will monitor all official forms for clarity and ease of use for the customer, imposing changes where necessary.

Information. Fianna Fáil will improve the quality of information available to the public, using new technologies and specialist information centres. We will increase feedback from customers through opinion polls, self-reporting systems, open door and round table conferences.

Complaints. We will improve in-house appeal procedures throughout the public service, and examine the areas which are at present off-limits to the ombudsman.

Breaking down bureaucracy. We will regroup agencies to reflect customer needs rather than administrative convenience.

We will localise and decentralise services, devolve policy implementation to lower level authorities, and carry out a programme of deregulation aimed at cutting back unnecessary regulation.

Revitalising the public service through best-practice management

Fianna Fáil will develop a new dynamic in the public service and foster a proactive and innovative spirit.

Our policy on entering government will be to immediately legislate to remove the obstructions and barriers which have restricted the potential performance and job satisfaction of many public servants.

Fianna Fáil will release this potential by ensuring that individual public servants are given every opportunity to use their creativity and personal abilities to provide a better service to the public.

This will be done through structured management systems, based on best practice. This will ensure that there will be no personal responsibility without equal authority and no authority without equal responsibility. Good job performance will be well rewarded and excellent job performance more highly rewarded.

This approach will carry forward the strategic management initiative, which was introduced by Fianna Fáil.

Creating a system of real local government

Fianna Fáil believe that a central part of bringing government closer to the people is to reform radically our system of local government.

Since independence our government has been over-centralised by international standards, with little real power devolved to local level. Previous attempts to address this issue have not been backed by a driving political will, and therefore nothing has happened.

Fianna Fáil believe that the time has now come to grasp this nettle, and give the people control over more of their affairs at local level.

Our aim is to develop a system of democratic decision-making which harnesses the energy of all citizens and maximises their capacity to shape the future development of their communities.

To achieve this, the new local government system will:

be structured so as to encourage maximum participation by people in decisions that affects their lives;

respond flexibly to local needs, and have the financial capability to do so adequately;

operate the principle of subsidiarity, that is, provide services at the lowest

level at which they can be delivered efficiently;

nourish a vibrant and healthy local economy;

allocate responsibility and resources, wherever practicable, to the people affected.

As part of our local government financial package, Fianna Fáil will cap levels by which local authorities can raise commercial rates each year.

Fianna Fáil in government will consult widely with all the interests involved, and within the lifetime of the next government begin this radical transformation in the structure of how we govern ourselves.

Making the oireachtas more relevant to everyday concerns

Fianna Fáil when in government have done most to make significant changes in oireachtas reform. On return to government we will progress reform to ensure that procedures in leinster house keep apace of change and that the oireachtas is truly representative of the people's interest.

In particular, it is important that the proceedings of the dáil and seanad are relevant to everyday events. Too often now, issues of topical concern can be discussed everywhere but in the houses of the oireachtas.

Fianna Fáil will:

change procedures in dáil plenary session to allow the raising of matters of public concern when they arise.

Revamp totally the system of parliamentary questions to make it more open and informative.

Disband the current committee system and reconstitute it in a more focused way.

We will set up five committees which are more in line with departmental responsibility, in these areas:

public accounts and expenditure

social affairs

economic affairs

foreign affairs

legal affairs

streamline voting procedures.

Consider the issue of financial autonomy for parliament.

Ensure that state companies, authorities and all such bodies are more accountable to the oireachtas.

Extending the franchise to emigrants

Fianna Fáil are committed to working out the necessary arrangements to give emigrants the right to vote in dail, presidential and European parliament elections, and in referendums. This can be done without amending the constitution.

Initially, those who have lived abroad for up to 10 years will be eligible. Our target is to have a voting system for emigrants in place by the year 2000.

Policing high standards in politics

the public have the right to demand high standards from politicians and political parties and it is the obligation of every politician to renew faith in our political system.

If we are to renew public confidence in the political and democratic system, it is important that any regulatory body is fully independent and readily accessible to citizens. There must be a credible mechanism in place to police standards and enforce accountability. The standards should be tough and the mechanism should have teeth.

To this end Fianna Fáil will set up a permanent public ethics commission to replace existing structures. The commission will be independently appointed and headed by a high-level public official, who will have the status of a high court judge or the ombudsman.

It will be charged with the task of examining any allegations of impropriety or ethical breaches or any reports of such allegations. Most importantly, the commission will be empowered to receive complaints from members of the public regarding public office-holders.

Reforming the constitution

Fianna Fáil will reconstitute the all-party oireachtas committee on the constitution. Consideration will be given to putting a number of proposals to the people in conjunction with the presidential election later this year. This will include the amendment on cabinet confidentiality.

Delivering on priorities in healthcare

Fianna Fáil in government will

learn from the lessons of the hepatitis c scandal

create a customer-focused healthcare service

make up the ground lost since 1994 on hospital waiting lists

target key healthcare areas for special attention

tackle the crisis in mental health

create a women-friendly health service

address the special health needs of the young, the elderly, and of men

put muscle into health promotion

after the hepatitis c scandal

Fianna Fáil recognised the enormity of the hepatitis c scandal since the first revelations, especially in relation to the mccole case. We have made it a priority in opposition and will continue to do so in government. We will listen to the victims and act in consultation with them.

We will implement in full the recommendations of the judicial inquiry into hepatitis c. We will ensure that compensation for the victims of this scandal is fair and that comprehensive counselling and care are available.

We will provide for the inquiry into the hepatitis c infection of haemophiliacs and the inquiry into the hiv contamination of blood and blood products. We will publish all correspondence and documents and investigate how the legal strategy in the mccole case was developed.

We will maintain the compensation tribunal on a statutory basis and provide additional personnel so victims' cases can be heard faster. Given the difficulty some victims have with life insurance and mortgage insurance, the state will consider providing underwriting services. Healthcare for victims will be developed and investment in research into hepatitis c will be accelerated. An epidemiological study into hepatitis c will be initiated.

All victims, including anti-d mothers, haemophiliacs, transfusion patients and renal patients, will receive fair treatment from the state.

A customer-focused healthcare service

given what has been revealed about the health service in the hepatitis c affair - people had difficulty getting basic information, and a culture of secrecy applied in many areas of the state apparatus - we believe there is a clear-cut need to introduce new systems to make the health service more open and more consumer-oriented. This pro-consumer trend in the health service has already

happened in Europe, but Ireland has lagged behind. Fianna Fáil will address this with the following initiatives:

complaints. We will require health boards to introduce proper systems for recording and responding to patients' complaints.

The department of health will publish a statistical report on the level of complaints on a hospital by hospital basis. We will ensure prompt action by hospitals with high levels of justified complaints.

Ombudsman. We believe people now want an identifiable office established where they can take complaints about the medical treatment they or their family have received. At present, the ombudsman can deal only with administrative matters relating to health boards. We believe that there should be an ombudsman for medical matters to investigate legitimate medical complaints. We will consult with all relevant interest groups on this proposal.

Watching over standards. We will create a system of audits of health service standards to ensure there can be no repeat of the hepatitis c scandal, when a state agency breached its own guidelines without detection. We will require all health agencies and hospitals to secure the quality assurance mark. We will also do clinical audits, to provide a systematic review of the way healthcare is delivered.

Health insurance. We will establish an independent vhi users' group to give the consumer a greater input. We will produce a white paper on health insurance to look at the options for the state, especially in relation to the vhi's future and the potential of a strategic alliance.

We will also order a revision of the health insurance regulations, to improve out-patient cover. The present regulations require the spending of large sums before any benefit can be claimed under health insurance. Fianna Fáil opposed the changes which led to cover for psychiatric in-patient treatment being reduced from 180 days to 100. This change had major implications in relation to anorexia, bulimia and other disorders. In government, we will aim to redraw these regulations so as to ease the situation of patients and their families.

General practitioners. We will aim to have all gms practices computerised, to enhance patient care and reduce the administrative burden on doctors. We will update the medical practitioners act, to reflect the vast changes in the medical regime over the past 20 years.

Modernising our hospitals and upgrading their services

as we have done before in government, Fianna Fáil will continue to develop and modernise our hospitals, to provide the best in modern care.

We will streamline accident and emergency services, especially in Dublin where a major crisis develops every winter. We will address this with:

tighter controls on admissions and discharge policies in major hospitals;

more rigid adherence by consultants to practice plans, which have already been

agreed with all areas of management, including nurses;

nursing units organised and run by nurses for patients who require minimum medical input but high levels of nursing care;

a review of the emergency ambulance service;

a review of the services provided by GPs, with a view to expanding them;

GP units in accident and emergency departments, along the lines of the scheme run in Cork.

We will tackle hospital waiting lists as a priority. The rainbow government have placed a lack of emphasis on the hospital waiting list initiative. Waiting lists increased by one-third at one stage during 1996.

Our aim will be to eliminate waiting lists of over 12 months in orthopaedic surgery (especially hip replacements), ophthalmology, ear, nose and throat, cardiac surgery, vascular surgery and plastic surgery. We will set a maximum period of 6 months for children awaiting ENT or eye treatment. We will ensure that quiet hospital periods such as the summer months are used to make inroads into the lists.

Ward closures and the closing of beds by the rainbow government have contributed to the escalation in the lists. We will undertake research into the underlying causes of delays and the variation in these around the country.

Targeting key healthcare areas for special attention

Drugs. We will implement our integrated drugs strategy, bringing together the interventions of several government departments.

Cancer. Our rate of deaths due to cancer is higher than the EU average, at around 7,500 a year. After heart disease, cancer is the country's biggest killer among under 65s. 18,000 new cases are recorded annually; in 1996, cancer accounted for 50,000 hospital episodes.

Cancer deaths among Irish women are particularly high and action needs to be taken. Screening can play a major part in detection and will be developed. Fianna Fáil are committed to the full implementation of the national cancer strategy, including the setting up of centres of excellence in Dublin, Cork and Galway and eight regional centres.

Hospices. A national hospice plan will be developed, and a home care service for the terminally ill will be developed in co-operation with GPs. We will set up a national advisory council for hospice and specialist palliative care services to advise the Minister on the development of the national plan, and on ways to encourage greater partnership between statutory and voluntary bodies in providing hospice and specialist palliative care services.

We will require each health board or authority to set up a regional hospice and specialist palliative care committee to implement the recommendations of the national council.

The important role of training and education in palliative care will be addressed in all service development plans.

Sight testing. We will extend nationwide adult sight testing for medical card holders, using the methods already in use by the eastern health board.

Meningitis. There has been a rapid increase in the number of meningitis cases this year. There have been many calls for a national surveillance centre to monitor meningitis, but the minister for health has postponed its setting up until 1998. Fianna Fáil in government will immediately set up the centre.

Dental services. We will work to make dental services more efficient and we will undertake a review to determine how best the services can be improved.

Medical cards. Fianna Fáil will review the guidelines issued by health boards for eligibility for medical cards. As is noted in the report on the integration of the tax and welfare systems, the guidelines can produce disincentives to work. In the review of the guidelines, Fianna Fáil will recognise there are particular hardships for low-income working families.

Addressing their difficulties, especially those with young children, will be a priority for Fianna Fáil. We will also assist the elderly, and we will consider doubling the income eligibility limits for medical cards for those over 65.

Tackling the crisis in mental health

Fianna Fáil recognise there is a crisis in mental handicap and mental health services. We will make mental handicap a priority area. It is our intention to tackle the crisis.

There are almost 2,400 people with a mental handicap on waiting lists for residential and day care places. There are 1,000 people with a mental handicap residing in appalling conditions in psychiatric hospitals.

In 1996, 66 new residential places were created when 1,450 were needed. And those families who have a service have no guarantee that it will be permanent - their service can be discontinued at any stage.

It will be our intention to substantially improve services over the lifetime of the government. We are firmly committed to tackling the situation in relation to inappropriate placements, the waiting lists for residential and day care and inadequate respite facilities.

In government, we will quickly publish a national 5-year plan for the development of mental health services. We will introduce early intervention groups at regional level to assist the parents and medical staff associated with people who are mentally handicapped. We will replace the current haphazard approach to funding the care and education of the mentally handicapped. We

accept that the national database needs resources.

The rainbow government have abysmally failed in the area of mental health. Despite a promise in its programme for government to continue to build on the improvements made up to 1994, the situation has not improved. The minister has even refused to publish the 5-year plan which he promised.

This has not stopped the government from making more promises. In partnership 2000, a commitment is given to develop services for people with mental handicap. The taoiseach in his speech to the labour party conference this year said: 'the mother whose child is diagnosed with a permanent disability should be guaranteed - and I mean guaranteed - that from that moment on, a range of services is available to her and to her child. Counselling, education, training, personal assistance, employment, residential and respite care - mothers who carry the burden of disability, and the people who constantly have to break down barriers to overcome disabilities - should both enjoy such a social guarantee.'

These words are from the leader of the party to which the minister for education belongs, and she is the person who appealed the judgement in the high court which held that Paul O'Donoghue had been denied his constitutional right to free primary education. It is also from a man who was one of the three leaders of a government that has never before treated the mental handicap sector with such disdain.

In the 36-year-old history of the national association for the mentally handicapped of Ireland, there has never been a situation where a minister for health refused to meet them during his or her term of office. However, the current minister for health never once met with namhi, and it was not from a want of trying on their part.

Addressing the healthcare needs of children and the elderly

Fianna Fáil will introduce mandatory reporting by professionals of known / suspected cases of child abuse. We will give formal and legal effect to notification procedures presently being put in place on foot of the Kilkenny and other reports. We will engage in normal consultations with interested parties in the implementation of this policy. We will extend childcare services through the development of a national childcare strategy. This will examine the setting up of a national council for children, to provide a range of research, training and development resources in the field of childcare.

We will make it a priority to address the current spread of responsibility for childcare matters between government departments. As a result, some children do not receive adequate care. The recommendations of the Kilkenny incest report, added to by the Kelly Fitzgerald report and the Madonna House report, form a blueprint for the development of appropriate responses on child abuse prevention and child protection.

We will develop the role of the ombudsman for children. A major priority for the plan will be to address the out-of-hours child protection service, which is currently poor. Each of the eight regional health boards will be obliged to develop a centralised child abuse register.

This will isolate children who are seen to be at risk and clarify the formal

status of their case. It will also facilitate co-operation between jurisdictions.

Health services for the elderly. Fianna Fáil will put in place a health service planning programme to tackle the challenge posed by the greying population. The number of persons aged over 65 is expected to grow over the next 30 years by up to 40%, while the number over 85 will also grow even more substantially.

We will consider initiatives in developing community care, in the provision of public and private nursing homes, in the availability of long-stay nursing care and for the development and remuneration of home-help services. We believe the payments for home help for the elderly and the sick must be addressed as a priority, particularly where high levels of dependency apply. We will seek to address the home help scheme to ensure the situation of carers is improved.

Creating a women-friendly health service

at present, the area of women's healthcare is fraught with service gaps. The life expectancy of Irish women is one of the lowest in the European union, and is fully two years less than the European average.

Fianna Fáil will undertake a major programme of action on women's health. Our aim will be to create a healthcare system that is women-friendly, and which operates on the principles of respect, consultation, involvement, empowerment and choice. We will engage in ongoing consultation with women in all sectors of society.

We will undertake a programme of strategic information and intervention programmes in relation to smoking and alcohol misuse by women in general and pregnant women in particular. This will include an education programme for second-level schools.

We will use all possible channels to disseminate information on when women should have cervical smear tests and how to conduct breast self-examination. We will implement as a matter of urgency the recommendation by the report of the commission on the status of women that cervical smear tests should be available on the GMS scheme for screening as well as diagnostic purposes. There will also be strategies to inform women about the health implications of the menopause and osteoporosis.

We will make family planning services available to all who need them, irrespective of where they live or their financial circumstances.

We will make parenting skills part of ante-natal and post-natal education, which partners will be encouraged to attend. Single women in particular will be given better preparation to care for their babies.

We will continue studies into the circumstances leading to crisis pregnancies and to abortions and to investigate how numbers can be reduced. We will provide comprehensive counselling and healthcare for women in crisis pregnancies.

Fianna Fáil have established an expert group to report on all aspects, including legislative and constitutional ones, in relation to abortion. When this group has reported, we will take the necessary action, taking into account the recommendations of the all-party committee on the constitution.

Acknowledging the problems of men's health

Up to now, health matters have been very much an out-of-bounds one for men. There is the perception that health matters are not men's scene. However, cancer and other health matters are also major concerns for men.

Men die six years younger than women. Diseases like coronary heart disease kill at least one in every three men. High blood pressure affects one in five. One in three gets cancer, while one in four dies from it. Prostate cancer in men is almost as common as breast cancer in women: one in every 32 males develops prostate cancer. Five times as many men die from cancer of the prostate as the number of women who dies from cervical cancer. Prostatic cancer is not as well researched as any of the female cancers.

Testicular cancer is the commonest form of cancer in men aged 15-44. One in every 251 men will develop cancer of the testes.

Women have used the health service more intelligently and more frequently than men. It is time for men to learn from women and the way they have raised consciousness over the last 20 years about their gender-specific cancers. Fianna Fáil's health promotion programme will address this.

Putting greater muscle into health promotion

Properly-resourced health promotion will be a priority of Fianna Fáil in government. We see health promotion as a highly cost-effective investment.

Suicide. Suicide is a growing problem in Ireland, especially among young people. As few as one in five young suicides give psychological treatment a chance before going to their deaths.

Fianna Fáil aim to change this through better availability of information, and better treatment of those at risk through alcohol dependence, drug abuse or depression.

We will bring in priority measures to research suicide. Better use will be made of the coroner's enquiry by extending the confidential report sent by the Gardaí to the central statistics office. We will consult with a view to developing media guidelines for reporting suicides.

Alcohol problems. We will control the advertising, packaging and promotion of

alcoholic lemonades, and consider imposing higher excise duties on these products.

We will develop an effective joint approach between the public and private sectors to encourage moderate use of alcohol. We will give particular attention to advertising aimed at young people.

Overall, Fianna Fáil will energetically implement the national alcohol policy in full, including the setting up of a national alcohol council.

Aids. We will ensure that all sexually-active men and women are informed of the risk factors associated with aids and how these risks can be minimised.

Asthma. Asthma is becoming the disease of the decade. We will introduce a high profile treatment and awareness programme, especially for young people who would benefit from early treatment.

Supporting the family and the rights of women

Fianna Fáil in government will

set up a commission for parents in the home

implement a strategy designed to reconcile work and family life

address the effects of divorce by appointing a commissioner for children and strengthening counselling and mediation services

facilitate adult adopted children and their birth parents who wish to make contact, and fully recognise foreign adoptions under Irish law

promote the status of women at work and in business

work to eliminate violence against women

create a fairer deal for charitable lotteries

parents in the home

there are 500,000 Irish women and a much smaller number of male parents working

full-time in the home. It is a priority of Fianna Fáil to provide them with support to enhance the quality of life in the home and community. Fianna Fáil will establish a commission for parents in the home to recommend a strategy for the next millennium.

Social isolation is a major concern. We will encourage the development of community-based groups and projects which help improve the position of parents at home.

Work and family life

Fianna Fáil are committed to an overall policy designed to reconcile work and family life. We will encourage job sharing, flexi-time and flexi-place working arrangements as ways of facilitating women who wish to participate in the workplace and maintain a family/home life.

There is a clear need for a co-ordinated programme to provide properly qualified child-carers and to maximise the use of community facilities for crèche and childcare facilities.

There is a need to develop programmes of after-school care and play schemes for holiday periods. Fianna Fáil will encourage individual schools to provide these programmes and will make arrangements to ensure that insurance can easily be put in place.

Fianna Fáil will introduce paternity leave, following consultation with the social partners. A childcare policy unit will be established in the department of health. Fianna Fáil's tax policy will make a contribution to the cost of childcare.

Addressing the effects of divorce

a commissioner for children. It is estimated that 10,000 to 15,000 couples will apply for divorce in the first few years. To ensure adequate protection for children, we will appoint a commissioner for children, initially attached to the courts, who will be responsible for highlighting to parents the needs of children in marriage breakdown/divorce and for pressing the needs of children in court where necessary.

Counselling. The initial impact of divorce may place a great burden on the available counselling service. Fianna Fáil in government will ensure that sufficient resources are made available to the existing marriage counselling services to enable them to meet the need for counselling that will arise in the next few years. We will also plan for the long-term future by creating a permanent counselling service supported by the state, to complement or augment the services provided by the churches.

Mediation. In each divorce case the judge has to be satisfied that adequate provision is made for dependants. Obviously, if in advance of the court appearance the parties have worked out an agreement on the financial matters, either by themselves or with the aid of a mediator, this would save court time and cut court costs. A mediation service is now available only in Dublin and Limerick. Fianna Fáil on return to government will begin immediately to set up

this service nationwide. We will look carefully at doing this in conjunction with the legal aid service as a one stop operation.

Bringing our adoption legislation up to date

many adopted children wish on reaching adulthood to establish contact with their birth parents, but this has not been possible under our closed adoption system. Fianna Fáil have presented a bill which establishes a voluntary contact register, and on return to government will immediately enact this bill. A register of this kind will enable a great many adopted children and birth parents to establish contact with each other, if both parties are in agreement, and is an essential first step in making progress in this area.

When Irish couples seek to adopt abroad, they very often are offered children only on a basis that is not yet recognised in Irish law, one that transfers parental rights and authority to the adopters but does not sever legal ties between the adopted child and the birth parents. The rainbow government have refused to extend recognition in Irish law to these adoptions. The result is that, for practical purposes, opportunities for Irish couples to adopt abroad have been hugely curtailed. As it is likely in the future that the numbers of babies available for adoption here will fall well short of meeting the needs of the many couples who wish to adopt, it is essential that the road block which the government have unnecessarily placed in the way of these couples is removed. Fianna Fáil in government will legislate to extend recognition in Irish law to adoptions effected abroad.

Women at work and in business

Fianna Fáil will progress steps to eliminate discriminatory and prejudicial practices in the public service.

We will amend the anti-discrimination (pay) legislation to allow the use of notional comparators. This will mean that workers in occupations which are overwhelmingly female will be able to base equal pay claims on the earnings of other groups of similarly qualified workers doing similar jobs.

We support the expansion of the existing joint labour committees to tackle effectively the problem of low pay as well as a national minimum hourly wage.

Fianna Fáil recognised the trend towards part-time work and expanded the social insurance system to provide cover for part-time workers. Some 70% of all part-time workers are female, many of whom will retire on a social welfare pension. However, the provision of occupational pensions is an outstanding issue and Fianna Fáil will seek to remove this discrimination on our return to government.

A certain percentage of training, education and community employment opportunities will be made available to women in the home who wish to return to the workforce.

Sexual harassment undermines an individual's dignity by bringing an unwanted and unwelcome connotation to working relationships. At present, there are no legislative provisions dealing with sexual harassment, although the current

employment equality bill endeavours to address it. Fianna Fáil believe that separate focused legislation is required.

Women are poorly represented at senior levels of responsibility in social partner organisations and are grossly under-represented on negotiating teams and on the central review committee of the national agreement. We will ensure that women are represented equitably on these negotiating bodies. It is also important that we reflect the views of parents working in the home in our social and economic planning. Fianna Fáil strongly support the establishment of quotas and targets for women as a medium term strategy and will work with the social partners to achieve realistic targets.

Fianna Fáil support the incorporation into legislation of European court decisions which provide that discrimination on the grounds of pregnancy is direct discrimination on grounds of sex and is therefore unlawful.

Fianna Fáil recognise that there are some internal flaws in the existing maternity protection legislation which require amendment to strengthen a woman's right to return to work after maternity leave.

Fianna Fáil will wholeheartedly support the continuing success of now, the European union equal opportunity scheme. Fianna Fáil will end discrimination in car insurance against spouses of policy holders, who at present are not entitled to any no claim bonus, if their spouse dies, even if they have been driving safely for years.

Violence against women

a recent survey revealed that 11% of women experienced physical violence and/or sexual violence. To address violence against women effectively Fianna Fáil will:

legislate for separate legal representation for victims of rape and sexual assault.

Secure funding for women's voluntary agencies.

Set up a domestic violence resource unit.

Put in place a treatment programme for sexual offenders, as well as a register of sexual offenders.

A fair deal for charitable lotteries

many charitable organisations pursue causes which greatly enhance the quality of community life, and in many instances cater for the essential needs of disadvantaged families. But lotteries conducted by charities have been almost driven out of business by the impact of the national lottery and recently by new

competition from the UK national lottery.

The problem is that there is no limit on prizes in the national lottery, where the jackpot alone can run into millions of pounds, but the charitable lotteries are strictly limited to £10,000 in prizes a week.

In addition, charitable lotteries are obliged by law to report to the Garda the names of all prize-winners and the amount of each prize. This applies even to scratch cards and places a major cost on the charitable lotteries. It also takes up valuable Garda resources which would be better spent in dealing with crime.

Fianna Fáil will immediately remove the cap on prize limits and will also remove the unfair burden of accounting and reporting of all prizes of less than £1,000.

Improve housing prospects for all

Fianna Fáil in government will

continue our innovative approach to social housing

bring about better co-ordination and co-operation between agencies in the housing field

give greater support to the fast-growing voluntary housing sector

carry out research into housing and homelessness

extend the shared ownership scheme and the sales scheme

legislate for speedier eviction of anti-social tenants and squatters

encourage rural resettlement

encourage home ownership and alternatives between renting and full ownership

increase the first-time buyer's grant to £5,000 for couples

enact our draft legislation to abolish ground rents

housing policy that adapts to change

In 1990 Fianna Fáil brought innovative concepts into our housing policy such as shared ownership. We created a framework for the growth of the voluntary housing sector. Fianna Fáil in government will continue to implement this policy, suitably adapted to meet the changing society in which we live. We believe there is an urgent need for better co-ordination and co-operation between the various agencies involved in social housing. We will work to co-ordinate all areas including rent allowances, social supports and caring.

We will respond to the need for more research

on housing and homelessness, to ensure a quicker and more flexible response to housing needs in the future. We will also monitor the implementation of social housing policy to ensure they do not have unforeseen adverse effects. For instance, we must take care that in buying existing houses a local authority does not distort the market or upset the social mix of areas.

Key elements of housing policy

Fianna Fáil will continue our commitment to the construction and acquisition of housing units by local authorities, and will continue to put resources into upgrading and refurbishing.

We will give greater recognition to the growing importance of the voluntary housing sector, with extra overall resources and financial improvements in the details of existing schemes.

We will phase in a well-targeted scheme of house repair grants.

We will develop and extend the shared ownership scheme, reflecting increased property values.

We will develop the sales scheme, with greater discounts for long-term tenants.

We will transfer the rent allowance scheme into local authority control, and co-ordinate it with the existing scheme of letting priorities.

We will make the maximum use of existing housing stock, with incentives to encourage elderly people to move to smaller accommodation designed for senior citizens.

We will complete the registration of private rented dwellings, and enforce standards and controls for the protection of both the tenant and landlord.

We will improve co-ordination between housing, social support and care, in view of the increasing number of older people in society.

We will aim to introduce broadly similar housing supports in the various housing categories local authority, private rented, and the voluntary sector.

We will improve and formalise estate management procedures.

We will bring in new legislation for local authorities and private landlords, so they can speedily evict anti-social tenants and squatters.

We will look at setting up a housing court to deal with all local authority and private housing issues.

We will continue and expand the policy of social integration in local authority housing. We will extend this to the private rent allowance sector by introducing guidelines or limits to the number of rent assisted dwellings in any area.

We will bring in tenant training for all new tenants, and create better awareness, implementation and enforcement of the tenancy agreement.

To rejuvenate rural areas, we will encourage rural resettlement and bring in a £3,000 grant for those surrendering local authority accommodation to purchase in rural areas.

We will improve the first-time buyer grant to £5,000 where the house is being bought in the joint names of a couple.

We will terminate ground rents, in accordance with our draft bill.

We will encourage individual home ownership and other arrangements between rental and full ownership.

Revitalising the fabric of our nation

focusing on learning needs, not bureaucracy

bringing sport and leisure to the centre of the national stage

balancing our population between urban and rural areas

putting new momentum into our transport system

completing the transformation of our roads system

following new approaches in energy

focusing on learning needs, not bureaucracy

Fianna Fáil in government will

give priority to computer literacy, science, languages and third-level research

commit the state to pre-school education

end the resource starvation in primary schooling

manage change effectively at second level, and search for a replacement of the points system

make a radical attack on the problem of students dropping out

set up a national psychological service to address learning difficulties

bring a coherent approach to further and higher education

in a world of increasing change, Fianna Fáil believe it is essential that we preserve and enhance all that is best in Irish education while adapting promptly to meet new needs as they emerge.

We consider that in today's world education must be a continuum, stretching from the earliest childhood years, right through school and college, during one's working life and into the days of retirement.

As well as providing a gateway to employment, education generates a great deal of national activity in imparting knowledge, passing on values, traditions, culture and heritage while enlivening each community with its own sense of place, and each individual with their own sense of worth and potential.

Fianna Fáil are immensely proud of the central role we have played in creating and developing our present education system, which is recognised internationally to be of a very high standard.

Giving priority to computer literacy, science, languages and third-level research

throughout the education system, there are certain key challenges created by the new world we are moving into. Fianna Fáil will address these decisively.

Computer literacy. We will introduce an information technology module to both primary and secondary schools and will ensure a cross-curricular application of information technology. We are committed to the aim of computer literacy for all students by the time they leave school.

Science. We will implement a practical science programme at primary level, based on individual experiments and project work by groups of pupils. We will initiate a major review of the effectiveness of present science teaching throughout the system.

Languages. Fianna Fáil will initiate a major analysis of all our language aims and achievements, as a basis for a new strategy that delivers effective fluency to all students of languages and equips Ireland with the language skills necessary for the world of the 21st century.

Third-level research. Although 80% of research in Ireland takes place in universities and colleges, our structures do not reflect this. We will increase third-level representation on the science, technology and innovation advisory council.

As a priority, in partnership with third level institutions and the business sector, we will reassess the focus, organisation and level of investment in research and put in place a wide-ranging 5-year strategic programme.

Committing the state to pre-school education

Fianna Fáil believe that our state education system can no longer neglect the importance of pre-school education.

This neglect reinforces disadvantage, as too often the less well-off children start off in school one step behind those more fortunate. As well as this, international experience suggests that early intervention is by far the best way of identifying and dealing with personality problems or learning difficulties.

Fianna Fáil will set up a national forum on early education. Its task will be to draw up a comprehensive programme for pre-school provision, to be implemented in full over five years.

Parents, teachers, childcare experts and workers, voluntary and statutory organisations will all be included in this forum.

We will carry out a national research project to determine best educational practice for early childhood.

The training of teachers, carers and parents, the recognition of qualifications, and the need to enhance the status of early education are among the matters that will be addressed.

Included in the remit of the forum will be the issues of urban and rural isolation, home-school liaison, assessment and early referral of problems.

Fianna Fáil will designate the department of education as the lead department in the provision of early childcare/education, and allocate a specific combined budget covering all the departments and state agencies involved.

Ending the resource starvation in primary schooling

Fianna Fáil believe that our primary schools are critically under-resourced, following 15 years of severe constraints on physical maintenance, staffing and administrative back-up.

Fianna Fáil will progressively, over the lifetime of the next government, make significant increases in the resources devoted to the needs of the primary sector.

There are no adequate excuses for sub-standard school buildings. We will put in place an ordered programme of building and refurbishment to tackle all the most serious cases over a 5-year period. We see administrative and caretaking services as basic necessities, and we will make them available. We will improve the pupil/teacher ratio by keeping in their schools the teachers who are freed up by falling numbers, thus continuing the policy we adopted in 1988.

We will make remedial teachers available to all primary schools and ensure an adequate supply of visiting teachers. We will create panels of supply teachers throughout the country, with positions available to qualified teachers on both a full-time and part-time basis. Where job-sharing can improve the educational outcomes for pupils and help lessen the burden of teaching principals and multiple-class teachers, we will encourage it. Under Fianna Fáil, staffing schedules will be based on a progressive reduction of class size, with particular emphasis on the needs of multi-class schools. We will adopt a more flexible approach to staffing schedules.

Fianna Fáil are determined to ensure the survival of rural schools. There are over 800 one- and two-teacher schools. Teaching principals and multiple classes are two key features of those schools. We will provide extra teaching resources and ancillary staff to assist the principal with administration. All one-teacher schools will get a second teacher as part of Fianna Fáil's overall rural regeneration programme. All two-teacher schools will retain their second teacher.

With the imminent arrival of the new primary curriculum, this is the time to map out a comprehensive programme of in-service teacher training and career development over the next five years. Fianna Fáil are determined to make available funding to prepare teachers adequately for the challenges of the new curriculum.

We will place renewed stress on basic learning skills reading, writing, communication, numeracy and on building up each pupil's self-confidence.

We will encourage outdoor activities, sport, project work, arts and crafts, participation in clubs and having hobbies.

Gaelscoileanna

Fianna Fáil supports the rights of parents to an all-Irish education for their children. We will, in consultation with all interested parties, draw up and implement a comprehensive 5-year plan to consolidate and develop gaelscoileanna throughout the country.

We will immediately set up a special unit within the department of education with overall responsibility for all policy on gaelscoileanna and gaeltacht schools including policy towards early recognition, school buildings, textbooks, and training of teachers and parents. Gaelscoileanna and gaeltacht schools will have direct access to this unit.

Fianna Fáil will implement the commitment in the white paper on education that full recognition and full entitlement to capital grants will be given to all-Irish schools from the date of their establishment, and on meeting agreed criteria.

Multi-denominational education

Fianna Fáil will implement the commitment in the white paper on education that full recognition and full entitlement to capital grants will be given to multi-denominational schools from the date of their establishment and on meeting agreed criteria.

We will also provide additional assistance to educate together, the national support body for multi-denominational schools. Access to funding for training parents in managing the schools will also be provided.

Managing change effectively at second level

the recent major curriculum changes at second level, however welcome in themselves, have thrown an unacceptable burden on schools, teachers and students because of inadequate planning and training.

Meanwhile, the stress for students associated with the points system has increased still further.

Fianna Fáil believe that not enough attention has been paid to the practical issues involved in bringing about change at school level, nor to the need to protect core subjects as the curriculum expands.

We will provide the support necessary to implement a balanced curriculum. The effective delivery of in-service training, which will not disrupt the learning experience of students, requires careful planning, maximum co-operation between the partners in education, and adequate funding. Fianna Fáil is committed to

that.

We will appoint a high-powered group to examine the points system a transparent but punishing system and see if an equally transparent but more humane system can be devised to lower stress levels, while improving learning techniques and access to further and higher education.

We favour the idea that students progress through education by accumulating credits, rather than by over-reliance on once-off final exams.

An effective middle-management structure, a proper administration system and in-career training for school principals must be provided for, and Fianna Fáil will ensure that.

Special consideration in funding arrangements will be given to smaller schools, particularly the 28% of schools with less than 300 pupils so that a wide choice of curricular options is available.

The ever-increasing efforts of parents to raise additional school funds reflects the major shortfall in departmental funding.

Fianna Fáil will simplify present funding arrangements and give income and corporation tax relief on individual and corporate donations to the technological, scientific or sporting activities of the school.

Make a radical attack on the problem of students who drop out

a real cause of concern is the alarming number of students who drop out of second-level schooling without adequate qualifications. This is estimated at about 20,000 each year. For these many thousands of students, our secondary education is not yet meeting their needs. It is a fact of Irish economic life that lack of qualifications can mean indefinite unemployability, as well as a drift into delinquency and crime.

Radical intervention is necessary to tackle this problem effectively. Fianna Fáil are determined to do this.

We will make an in-depth analysis of this educational gap, and work with the partners in education to design curricula that suit the needs of all students.

We will appoint sufficient ex-quota remedial and career guidance teachers.

We will incorporate modules on specific learning difficulties into all pre-service teacher training.

We will review the whole area of home/school liaison, career guidance and counselling, so that a personal development plan for each student can be mapped out to complement their talents, address their weaknesses and assess their

employment prospects.

We will support the national association for children and adults with learning disabilities with a bloc grant, so they can provide a more comprehensive nationwide service for children who have specific learning difficulties. Fianna Fáil have produced a comprehensive document on disability which includes a specific agenda for all aspects of disability in education. This will be implemented on Fianna Fáil's return to government, to promote individual empowerment.

We will extend youthreach, the successful scheme launched by Fianna Fáil's present leader and deputy leader in 1989. This works well with over 5,000 students each year, bringing them through a standard foundation stage and then on to a progression stage which should lead to employment, further training, a return to school or some combination of those. Youthreach has a success rate of over 40%. To extend it, we will

initiate a series of pilot projects designed to assist under-15s who are in danger of dropping out; create new youthreach options within the content, context and structures of the course;

initiate pilot youthreach projects that bring together much smaller groups with individual teachers, over at least an 18-month period, to try and break the cycle of alienation, frustration, or disadvantage.

Bringing a coherent approach to further and higher education

Fianna Fáil is concerned at

the inappropriate nature of many of the proposals in the rainbow government's education bill;

the lack of appreciation of the role of the universities evident in their white paper on science, technology and innovation;

the mishandling of issues relating to the upgrading of rtcs; and

the unstructured way plc courses are being developed in second-level schools and colleges of further education.

To address these and other urgent issues, Fianna Fáil will immediately commission an expert study to examine the structures and processes within the higher and further education sectors, with a view to recommending a more coherent and co-ordinated system than exists now.

The scope of the review will cover all institutions which offer publicly-funded higher and further education. The review will also cover the structures and processes for certification, validation, accreditation, and conferring of awards for all publicly funded programmes. Fianna Fáil's aim is to put in place at the earliest possible date an efficient and effective integrated national framework for higher and further education.

Post leaving certificate courses. The plcs, pioneered by the vecs, offer a wide range of diverse courses catering for the demands of current job-trends. This sector with its 20,000 students deserves to be supported equitably. Fianna Fáil will fund plc students on the same basis as other students in similar circumstances at third level.

Plc colleges require significant capital investment to provide facilities and equipment. Fianna Fáil will accelerate the capital development programme for further education colleges, using EU structural funding. We will also develop a partnership with the private sector to provide technological equipment.

Fianna Fáil see the plcs as part of an overall ladder of progression within the national certification framework. We will advance the progress made by the neva in this regard, and ensure that teastas creates an effective ladder of progression that facilitates mobility between all post-secondary courses.

Restoring autonomy to third level

at third level, Fianna Fáil will re-establish the principle of academic freedom and autonomy, which has been seriously undermined by the rainbow government.

We recognise that each third-level institution must be fully accountable for all money it receives from the public purse. But we believe that mission statements should not be dictated by the department of education or any outside body. We believe that each third-level institution must be allowed develop within its own ethos and traditions.

In government, Fianna Fáil will

pay particular attention to the need for more space for students in university libraries.

Encourage colleges to address the unacceptably high attrition rate in many first year courses. Greater efforts must be made to integrate new students into the different learning experience of third-level.

Improve provisions for post-graduate students.

Facilitate maximum access to third-level education, by adjusting financial arrangements which affect second-chance and part-time students, and by requiring all colleges to operate access programmes for disadvantaged students.

Examine the case made by private third-level colleges to have their students fees paid by the state.

Make obligatory a secure system of bonding for private colleges, to ensure that students obtain the courses they have paid for.

Set up a centralised grant authority to deal with all applications and payments, and ensure prompt payments to students. This will include an independent appeals procedure.

Develop a co-ordinated health promotion scheme for third level colleges. Currently there is approximately one doctor on campus for each 8,500 students, which is clearly inadequate. There is also need for more childcare facilities on college campuses, to allow many more people the opportunity of attending third level courses. We will improve facilities for students who are disabled, in line with our comprehensive overall policy on disability.

Giving new impetus to adult education

Fianna Fáil recognise that increasing attention must be paid to adult education. This may well be the fastest growing sector of Irish education, and there is every indication that it will become even more important in the future. It has particular value in providing second-chance education for the disadvantaged, and in creating a vehicle for life-long learning.

Fianna Fáil will ease adult access to education by removing any bureaucratic red-tape which prevents women in particular from taking up training or education. We will increase funding to the national adult literacy agency which has made tremendous strides in bringing the serious problem of adult illiteracy to public attention.

Creating new structures that enhance learning

Fianna Fáil believe in a fundamental shift of responsibility down to the individual school, and in spending the greatest possible amount of education resources on improving the learning possibilities for students.

We will encourage further devolution of power to school boards of management, and we will ensure that the vital role of both parents and teachers as education partners becomes a reality. We will offer training to members of management boards, to help clarify their responsibilities and identify clearly their role. We will provide funding for management and parent organisations at national and local level, so they can fulfil their essential role in our education system.

Along with devolution, there is need at the local level for more pooling of resources and expertise, and better co-ordination between all partners in education. However, Fianna Fáil believe that the right way to achieve this is certainly not through the vastly expensive and cumbersome regional boards proposed by the rainbow government.

Fianna Fáil will set up in each area a county (or city) education forum. The forum will express the local consensus of opinion on matters educational, with the aims of ensuring equality of opportunity for all, innovating new services and ensuring that every available education pound goes into the classroom. The forum will provide a basis to co-ordinate local education services, share resources and develop a partnership response to education issues. All partners in education will be represented.

At national level, Fianna Fáil will set up a national psychological services board to service all primary and secondary schools. Their remit will extend to pre-school children, in liaison with health authorities, and to students who

drop out of school at late primary or early second level.

This service will be independent of the department of education, but will work in close co-operation with families, schools and the department.

We will broaden the remit of the national council for curriculum and assessment, which has played a central role over the past ten years charting the way forward in curriculum change. We will extend this role to include the evaluation of the council's own reforms, so that continuing change is made a permanent element in Irish education. We will also broaden the membership of the council to include more expertise relevant to the needs of the many students who drop out from education.

Bringing sport and leisure to the centre of the national stage

Fianna Fáil in government will

use the potential of sport and leisure to create a healthy society

appoint a senior minister for sport, create a new national sports body with greater powers, and increase lottery funding for the area

appoint sport and leisure officers at local authority level, and community facilitators for disadvantaged areas

build sport and physical training into the school curriculum, including the assessment process

encourage joint ventures between the public and private sectors to provide national and regional facilities, using the 50-metre swimming pool as a headline project

create tax and other incentives to stimulate investor interest

the wider role of sport and leisure

Fianna Fáil fully recognises the value of sport and leisure to the physical and mental health of each individual.

However, our policy initiatives in this area stem just as much from a belief in the potential of sport and leisure to create a healthy society, based on vibrant communities with strong loyalties and attachments.

There is an important place for sport at the top-performing or even intermediate levels of competition. However, that is only part of the picture.

The real challenge, for Ireland today, is to develop policies on sport and leisure which cater for the community as a whole.

Many of our most acute urban problems, such as drugs and crime, stem from a lack

of confidence, self-esteem and sense of purpose, particularly on the part of young people, many of whom have not succeeded in the education system. Our policy seeks to harness the potential of the sport and leisure area to motivate young people to avoid the scourge of drugs and crime.

Equally important, we look to sport and leisure for the role they can play in fostering a sense of community identity in even the most deprived and depressed areas.

Seven key initiatives to bring sport and leisure centre stage

Fianna Fáil will:

set up a new department of tourism and sport. This recognises both the need to have a senior minister with responsibility for sport, as well as the complementary nature of the tourism and sport and leisure sectors. (Trade, which is at present coupled with tourism in one department, will be relocated in the department of enterprise and employment.)

create a new sports body with greater autonomy and increased powers, to replace the existing structure. It will have a primary role in decisions on funding and on the development of facilities on a national and regional basis.

Allocate a larger share of national lottery funding to sport, in line with the original intentions for the lottery.

Appoint sport and leisure officers in each county council or corporation area. They will have responsibility for managing the sport and leisure sector in their area. To address the problems in inner city and other similar urban areas, we will employ community recreational facilitators to develop sport and leisure as an alternative and positive focus for young people.

Appoint more physical education teachers in schools, where the emphasis should be on participation and fun rather than competition. We will build sport and physical training into the curriculum, and proficiency in it will be incorporated into the junior and leaving certificates and the points system.

Encourage partnerships between state and private sector funding in sport and leisure projects, and create tax reliefs and other incentives for private investors to stimulate maximum interest in the sector.

Invite proposals for the construction of a 50-metre swimming pool, to serve both as an international arena and as a quality training facility. This project will be a headline for the type of joint venture between the public and private sectors which are necessary for to provide adequate facilities nationwide.

Balancing our population between urban and rural areas

Fianna Fáil in government will

initiate a comprehensive programme of rural development

take advantage of new technologies to encourage economic activity in rural areas

create development structures geared to the needs of rural development, and encourage rural enterprise by adjusting the social welfare means test

provide state services at local level, and accelerate the decentralisation of central services

provide equal quality in infrastructure and services throughout all regions

equalise utility charges and other costs between rural and urban areas

develop a comprehensive programme to address the needs of our islands

acting while there is still time

Fianna Fáil believe that the time has now come to create a radical new programme aimed at restoring the balance of our population between urban and rural areas.

If we do not act now, many rural communities will lose their viability and the depopulation trend will become irreversible. Meanwhile, the overbalanced growth of our large urban areas is creating social problems we can no longer ignore. Stimulating rural development will take some of the increasing pressure off our cities.

Fianna Fáil's rural development policy is based on recognising a number of basic realities.

First, people will always go where the jobs are. Without adequate employment in rural areas, depopulation is inevitable.

Second, agriculture can no longer on its own hope to sustain rural communities. Fianna Fáil's policy is to keep as many farm

families as possible on the land, but other forms of activity must exist to supplement the core contribution that agriculture makes. Increasingly, we see future job creation in rural areas in the services sector.

Third, rural development cannot succeed fully until people in rural areas can get the same range and quality of services as in urban areas and at the same price. Too often, people living and working in rural areas do so under a handicap.

Fourth, new technology particularly in communications now offers for the first time an opportunity to provide economically a wide range of services at truly local level. Technology now also makes it possible to run many more types of business from a rural base.

Eleven steps on the road to population stability

Fianna Fáil in government will

1 begin an energetic programme of localisation of state services that are now provided centrally. We will aim to make the computerised local post office a one-stop shop for most state services, and bring as much administration as possible down to the regional and county level. We will apply the principle that as much healthcare as possible is provided locally, particularly in long-stay and residential units.

2 continue the decentralisation of state services. We will put emphasis on moving small, self-contained sections of government departments to towns, where an influx of even 30 or 40 well-paid service jobs could revitalise a community. All state agencies whose main function is to serve rural needs will be relocated. Other state agencies which do not have an essential need to be in Dublin will also be progressively relocated around the country.

3 simplify the development structure in rural areas, delivering services through a one-stop shop such as the county enterprise board. We will create regional agencies to focus on rural development only, and encourage a nationwide network of community-controlled development associations.

We will give priority to rural tourism, encouraging the development of niche products and the refurbishment of small hotels and guesthouses.

4 encourage rural enterprise by adjusting the means test for social welfare benefits. This currently operates so as to leave self-employed people no better off through working. We will disregard all income below a certain threshold – for example, farmers with five livestock units or less, fishermen with a boat of less than 26 feet. We will also address the means test difficulties of pensioners with savings.

5 set up funding structures that will allow local money to find an outlet in local development, rather than being sucked out of rural areas.

6 provide all regions with a broad equality of basic infrastructure for example, roads, telecommunications, airports, water, sewerage, natural gas. We will ensure that the new technology in telecommunications (such as isdn) is fully available everywhere, on an equal basis. We will actively develop the six regional airports as economic and social catalysts for the areas they serve. We will encourage the small-scale development of alternative sources of energy at local level. We will speed up local improvement schemes, cutting the waiting lists to under one year within the lifetime of the next government (at present, schemes can wait up to eight years to be realised).

7 establish the principle of uniform charges throughout the country for services such as telecommunications, electricity, sewerage/refuse disposal, etc. This would also apply to installation charges, which can be crippling in rural areas. Where rural businesses are at a cost disadvantage (for instance, because they tend to pay more in taxes on transport), we will seek to redress the balance.

8 provide an adequate level of rural policing, and provide assistance to old people to protect their houses against burglary. We will keep open rural garda stations, and encourage Gardaí to live where they work.

9 maintain the number of rural schools, provide a second teacher for all one-teacher schools, and ensure that rural schools are not disadvantaged because of their size in terms of the range of subjects they can offer. We will revamp the school transport system to reduce drastically the distance children have to walk each day to get a bus. We will provide resource and remedial teachers, based on pupil need in each school. We will ensure that a wide range of plc courses are available in rural towns, and develop out-reach campuses for rtcs and universities.

10 review housing regulations and practices to make it easier and cheaper to build houses in rural areas, and to encourage relocation of people to rural areas.

11 seek, at EU level, objective I status after 1999 for all rural areas suffering from population decline.

Addressing the needs of our islands

our inhabited islands suffer all the problems faced by other rural areas, with additional handicaps because of their remoteness. Fianna Fáil will adopt an integrated approach to improve the quality of life and equal access to opportunities of the people who keep our islands inhabited. The main issues requiring action concern basic services, lack of infrastructure, access costs, and education.

We will analyse the access needs of the islands, and draw up a 5-year plan to ensure that every island has subsidised ferry access and adequate piers. Where there is an access problem in the winter and no airstrips exist, a regular helicopter service will be provided during winter and emergency cover all year. We will examine the feasibility of more airstrips, particularly to tory island, clare island, inishturk and inishbofin.

We will provide access to all basic services, including healthcare, of a quality and at a price comparable to that available on the mainland.

For those islands without enough population to sustain a secondary school, the remote area grant will be improved and means testing of it abolished. Every effort will be made to ensure that students from the islands are able to return home as regularly as possible.

We will create a special islander allowance, to offset the higher cost of living on the islands. We will adjust the social welfare means test to encourage enterprise.

We will encourage all islands to have a full-time development association funded under a scheme similar to the scheme operated by *ceardáirs na gaeltachta* for the *comharchumainn gaeltachta*. These associations will work with government departments, county councils and state agencies in a partnership for developing the islands.

Putting new momentum into our transport system

Fianna Fáil in government will

open up new air links with the us and the pacific rim

encourage regional airlines and regional airports

campaign in Europe for the continuance of duty-free shopping

invest in the main line rail network, including high-speed links

regenerate public transport in dublin

undo the mistakes of the light rail project, and speed up its completion

fund transport investments in innovative ways

developing new air links

Fianna Fáil will aggressively develop to the full Ireland's air links with the rest of the world. We believe they are a vital part of our economic growth overall and particularly our tourism.

We will abolish landing charges for new routes operated to Irish airports for a five-year period. This move has twin aims: to encourage hub operations at dublin and shannon by major us carriers, and to encourage direct links between Ireland and the countries of the pacific rim. Such a pricing policy will exploit the severe capacity crunch that is arising in london through the shortage of slots at heathrow.

N we will also offer special landing-fee arrangements for airlines

bringing passengers to Ireland to link up with cruises. (This will be part of an overall policy to increase the use of Ireland as a cruising base.)

n we will continue to make shannon airport a key focus for the development of the mid-west region.

N we will treat aer lingus as the major national asset it is, especially since the investment of £175 million of taxpayersi money. Fianna Fáil condemn the handling of the strategic alliance proposed by the present minister, and in particular the failure to consult with aer lingus unions and employees.

N we will use the business expansion scheme to encourage regional airlines.

N as set out in our policy document, we will support the network of regional airports which we backed while other parties doubted them. We will facilitate the use of the business expansion scheme to develop and market these airports, and we will revamp the marketing fund for them. Our aim is to make regional airports more attractive to travellers through enhanced facilities.

N we will strongly resist EU plans to abolish duty-free shopping after june 1999. Duty-free shopping generates more than £100 million for Irish companies, and thousands of Irish jobs depend on it. We are appalled at the weak effort of the rainbow government to defend Irish interests. We believe there is an unanswerable case to continue duty-free for several years beyond 1999, as there are still widely-divergent tax rates in the EU on wine, beer and other goods.

Investing in the rail system

Fianna Fáil are committed to investment in the mainline rail network and in the development of high speed services.

N we will provide for special investment in high-speed intercity rail.

N we will require all new train stations to have sufficient parking, the cost to be shared by iarnr-d žireann and the local authority that benefits from reduced traffic.

N we will encourage the development of arrow-type railcar services on rural lines, to provide renewed and more frequent service.

N we will improve public transport in cork, in the spirit of the original recommendations of the land use transportation study. We will carefully consider re-opening of the railway line to midleton and eventually youghal, and the opening of the non-commuter stations from the north side of cork through to cobh.

Regenerating public transport in dublin

n dublin cannot remain the only European capital without a rail link to its international airport. As a matter of urgency we will develop, possibly in conjunction with aer rianta, a rail connection between dublin

airport and the city centre using the mainline rail network, dart or light rail.

N we are committed to upgrading suburban rail links. We will give priority to upgrading and doubling the maynooth line, and will open a commuter station at monasterevan. We will accelerate extending the dart to greystones and malahide and opening new stations at fairview and barrow street. We will transform the totally overcrowded and inadequate rail service from balbriggan to dublin, by providing extra carriages and trains at peak times and by improving the timetable and ancillary facilities.

N we will make it a condition of planning permission for housing estates that their impact on public transport be addressed. Many bus routes are unchanged for 30 years despite huge population changes. As part of the revamp of routes, we will create new cross-city routes.

N we will attack traffic congestion through a co-ordinated traffic plan for dublin city and county. This will provide for by-passes, pedestrianisation, disc parking, and the contracting out of clamping.

N we aim to extend dart operating hours to continental norms(6am to about 1am). We will develop further late night bus services.

Getting the light rail project right

management of the light rail project under the rainbow government has been nothing short of disastrous. Luas is behind schedule, consultation has been totally inadequate, and some of the decisions taken so far appear at the very least questionable. Fianna Fáil will re-energise the light rail project, while fully addressing the real concerns that have been expressed by a wide range of people.

Key aspects of our policy on light rail are:

n light rail cannot deliver its potential unless the scheme is completed in its entirety. Fianna Fáil will therefore build all three dublin light rail lines to sandyford, tallaght and ballymun.

N the option of putting light rail underground in the city-centre area has not been properly examined. Fianna Fáil will commission a fast-track independent study of this option, while at the same time investigating the possibility of additional funding from EU or other sources. As the statutory inquiry is likely to insist on fully examining the underground option, carrying out this study will not in fact delay the project.

N concern over the disruption that will certainly be caused during the construction of luas has not been properly addressed. Building on the experience of cities elsewhere, Fianna Fáil will appoint a special planner whose sole job will be to minimise disruption. This planner will have over-riding power to force all state utilities to co-ordinate their service work; this will stop redigging of streets after they have already been disrupted. The luas planner

will also inform the public in advance of impending disruption and will agree a timetable of street changes and alterations.

N in its present form, luas is not properly integrated with the rest of Dublin's public transport. Fianna Fáil will fully integrate light rail with the Dart and with bus services, and extend the lines where obvious traffic potential or need exists (such as to Sandycove industrial estate, the IFSC, and new developments in the docklands). Tickets between the luas, Dart and buses will be fully interchangeable.

Looking for new ways to fund transport

where projects have particular financial benefits for commercial organisations, we will seek commercial participation in the investment in return for a say in the running, routing and scheduling of services through a joint management committee. Possible projects include extending light rail to Dublin's docks and creating a rail link to the airport in conjunction with Aer Rianta.

Completing the transformation of our roads system

Fianna Fáil in government will

maintain and if possible accelerate the upgrading of national primary routes

provide more adequate funding to maintain these routes in optimum condition

give priority to upgrading important national secondary routes

ensure increased funding to maintain regional and county roads

give local authorities more flexibility on how they use their own resources on county roads

a key element of our infrastructure

Fianna Fáil will maintain a high level of spending on roads. They are an essential element of our internal infrastructure, facilitating personal mobility, commerce and tourism. In the future, it is inevitable that our roads will be under more pressure as we approach closer to average European levels of car ownership.

Fianna Fáil fully recognise, however, that roads are only one part of our overall national transport strategy. Efficient public transport is vital, to keep our roads free of congestion and to prevent our environment being totally sacrificed to the needs of vehicle users.

Since the late 1970s, Fianna Fáil has concentrated a major share of public investment funding, both domestic and European, on modernising our roads. Spending was doubled in our 1981 investment plan, and our negotiation of massive

increases in EU funding in 1989 and 1993 has enabled a major acceleration of road spending. This is now transforming our road network.

Our general objectives on roads are:

n to maintain and, if resources permit, accelerate the upgrading of our national primary routes;

n to provide more adequate funding to maintain these roads in optimum condition;

n to develop as a priority a more ambitious programme for upgrading important secondary national routes, which are at present seriously neglected;

n to ensure that increased funding continues to be available to maintain all regional and county roads to an acceptable standard.

National primary roads

we will complete as soon as possible the dublin ring road;

our target will be to upgrade the dublin road to the border to continuous motorway standard by 2005;

we will aim to provide continuous motorway to kinnegad for all routes to the west and north-west, and to have motorway standard to portlaoise by 2005;

we will complete the upgrading of the naas dual carriageway, pending the construction of a new motorway by 2005;

we will give priority to improving national routes in or between major cities or ports like rosclare, waterford, cork, limerick, galway and sligo; to strengthening connections between regions as well as the radial routes to and from dublin; and in particular to alleviating points of severe congestion (e.g. On the shannon-ennis road), including bottlenecks on the periphery of our major cities.

National secondary roads

we will give particular priority to a serious programme of upgrading the more important main tourist roads (with full regard to environmental considerations in areas of high amenity) and other roads of economic importance.

We will also upgrade secondary roads between important towns. As a priority, we will provide a second river crossing in waterford.

Regional, county and urban roads

county roads are in a serious state of disrepair and need to be given higher priority. While the amounts allocated to national roads have increased over the past five years, much more needs to be done to provide a reasonable standard of

roads in rural Ireland. Fianna Fáil's òreal local government will ensure that priority, by allowing local authorities to retain a proportion of motor taxation specifically to fund works on county roads, and by giving local authorities much more discretion over their spending.

Safety and directions

road improvements will increase safety and reduce death and injury. We will provide markings on all roads of a width where this is practicable, and especially on dangerous bends. We will have signposts put up at all crossroads and junctions.

Environment

where a new road or major road improvement is to take place, there will be proper consultation with residents, landowners and others affected. We believe more pre-planning consultation will mean decisions can be taken more expeditiously and will reduce unnecessary conflicts and confrontation.

Due regard will be paid to the needs of safety of people crossing, to ensuring that any division of land and communities is properly bridged, to noise pollution and effects on visual and other amenities, and to facilities for archaeological investigation.

In line with our commitment to òpeople before politics, division of communities to facilitate roadworks will be avoided as much as possible.

Funding

increased funding for roads has to be found within budgetary parameters. While some increased funding is required for national road development and maintenance, as well as for county and regional roads, new expenditure is required to develop a programme for improving our national secondary roads.

N Fianna Fáil will complete the present operational programme, matching exchequer funding to EU funding in accordance with the agreed proportionality;

n we will seek to negotiate, if necessary on a regional basis, continuing EU funding after the year 2000 to support our roads programme. We will also seek continued EU funding for those roads that are part of our trans-European networks;

n we are open to infrastructural projects being entirely financed by the private sector to the specifications of the national roads authority;

n we will not introduce tolls on roads jointly funded by the taxpayer and the Eu, such as the dublin ring road or the lee tunnel. Tolls on roads in the immediate vicinity of cities defeat the purpose of relieving congestion.

N funding for county roads will be increased each year over the next five years to accelerate the current 10-year programme. A scheme will be put in place to encourage local authorities to increase their input into county roads from own resources.

Following new approaches
in energy

Fianna Fáil in government will

encourage exploration for oil, exploiting new technology.

Manage EU-driven change in the electricity industry in a way which best meets Ireland's needs.

Extend natural gas to new customers.

Extend peat production for power generation.

Aggressively pursue alternative sources of renewable energy.

Conserve energy right across the economy.

Ensuring the country's energy supplies

Oil. We will actively encourage oil exploration through new incentives for use of modern exploration technology. We will seek to maximise the benefits to the Irish economy of any oil finds, including the number of Irish workers working on oil rigs and throughout the process.

Minerals. We will adopt a pro-active minerals policy, to maximise the contribution the minerals industry can make to the national economy and employment while ensuring the highest standards of environmental protection, health and safety, in consultation with local authorities. We will actively promote minerals development, subject to these requirements, under a clear legal and fiscal regime.

Electricity. Fianna Fáil will manage the EU requirement for changes in the electricity industry in a way that best meets Ireland's needs. In choosing new structures for the industry we will ensure that the reliability of the national electricity supply is retained and the interests of all electricity customers are protected.

Gas. We will review third party access to the gas interconnector, on which Bord Gáis currently has a virtual monopoly. We will aim to extend natural gas as far as practicable, to all major towns and cities, including Galway and Sligo.

Peat. We will support the further development of Bord na Móna, and will fast-track the major new peat station in the Midlands. We will upgrade the Bellacorick peat station, so as to prolong its natural life.

N alternative sources. We will vigorously promote renewable energy projects, while continuing our opposition to nuclear power.

Taking alternative energy seriously

Fianna Fáil will strongly encourage energy production from renewable sources, or sources which offer an opportunity of reducing landfill.

We will carry out research into new energy sources, and publish a green paper that will consider all such sources that are environmentally sustainable. We will then develop a realistic plan for the use of alternative energy. This will include targets for the future generation of electricity from renewable energy sources, and for the reduction of non-renewable resources in electricity generation.

We will create incentives for the private sector to produce energy from alternative sources, and give financial support for pilot projects. Taxes and subsidies will be used to differentiate in favour of renewable energy production for example, the first-time house buyer's grant will be worth more for houses that use solar heating.

We will bring in a scheme to develop small-scale electricity generation projects based on renewable energy, and allow access to the electricity network for generators of renewable energy who wish to sell 'green' electricity to consumers.

Biomass. We will pay particular attention to helping this technology be demonstrated in both large and small energy crop projects, and to helping small-scale projects sell directly into the retail energy market.

Wind energy. We will use a combination of tax concessions, premium buy-back rates and subsidies to stimulate the market for wind energy. We will invite tenders from local authorities in areas with high average wind speeds for a wind energy park we will look at the possibility of giving households near a wind farm a compensatory subsidy to reduce their electricity bills.

Energy from waste. We will carefully examine the possibility of greatly reducing the amount of household waste going to landfill sites by producing combined heat and power from the waste. The potential saving in landfill is up to 50%.

Saving energy right across the economy

we will set strict targets for energy reduction within all public sector organisations. All public sector bodies will have an environmental management system, including targets for the reduction of energy.

We will consult with each sector of industry and then draw up sectoral plans for energy reduction. These will have specific targets, and performance will be closely monitored. We will promote more vigorously energy audits and voluntary arrangements with industry.

We will implement a nationwide energy-awareness programme, including schools, colleges, local authorities, and community groups. We will promote products that use less energy or help conserve it through an Irish eco-labelling scheme. Information for consumers on the cost of fuel consumption for vehicles over the lifetime of a vehicle will be supplied by producers and sales outlets. In designated areas, tax breaks on properties will be tied to energy efficiency.

As part of a national programme for domestic energy conservation, we will set up a national energy trust. This will advise suppliers and consumers on energy conservation, and will initiate research and pilot actions. We will bring in far stricter building regulations, covering insulation and other energy saving measures, and develop a 'green' building rating for energy efficiency. For first-time buyers, we will positively discriminate grants in favour of housing with higher efficiency ratings.

Fuelling the engines of growth

putting Ireland ahead in the information age

rewarding the risk-takers

creating a competitive tourism industry for the 21st century

developing the full potential of Irish agriculture

harnessing our marine resources

re-creating a dynamic state sector

putting Ireland ahead in the information society

Fianna Fáil in government will

grasp the historic opportunity the information age offers us

reverse the neglect of the rainbow government on this key issue

make information technology an education priority, with every student computer-literate

put in place a 5-year plan to bring computers and the internet to every classroom

restore the momentum necessary to put Ireland in the top quarter of developed countries for telecoms performance

revisit telecom žireannis strategic alliance deal, to get a better result for the national interest

grasping an historic opportunity

Fianna Fáil believe that the information age offers Ireland a massive opportunity- one that, if we grasp it properly, can greatly enhance the economic future of everyone in the country. The reason is that the new age offers us, for the first time since the industrial revolution, a way around the disadvantages we have always suffered because of our remote position on the periphery of Europe.

In the information age, where we are will no longer matter. Ireland will be as well-placed as any country in a truly global market-place, if we have the right infrastructure in place. Indeed, because of the calibre of our people, Ireland is ideally positioned to become a leader in a world that will be dominated by knowledge industries.

However, this opportunity must be grasped - the dividend from the information age will not come to us automatically. On the contrary: if we do not prepare properly, we will be left behind. If we fail to meet the challenge, the information age could undermine much of the economic success we have enjoyed so far.

We must ready ourselves for the new era in two main ways. First, through the education system, preparing our people for a totally new way of doing things. Second, through our communications infrastructure, making sure that our people have full, low-cost access to the tools that make the new ways possible.

In both these critical sectors, we are already behind. In both these areas the rainbow government has failed the people of Ireland. A recent survey showed Ireland to be, not in the vanguard of information age readiness where we could and should be, but in the third division of countries.

Educating for a new age

in Fianna Fáil's education green paper of 1992, we clearly signalled the coming significance of information technology in education.

Fianna Fáil's policy document on information technology in education, published earlier this year, led the way in proposing a radical new departure. Since then the rainbow government has issued its own 5-year programme. Where appropriate or worthwhile, Fianna Fáil will incorporate elements of that programme into our own much more wide-ranging policy.

We will make information technology an education priority.

Fianna Fáil in government will ensure that every young person is computer literate by the end of their school career. We will make information technology a fully integrated and fully available component of the Irish education system.

We will put in place a 5-year programme of research between third-level colleges and business.

We will establish a new body combining the hea, third-level institutions, ida, forbairt, forfás and ibec to co-ordinate national up-skilling in new technologies.

We will consider setting up a science, technology and innovation forum, to promote Ireland as a centre of scientific and technological excellence.

Towards computer literacy in five years

Fianna Fáil will put in place a 5-year plan, at the end of which every classroom in the country will have a multimedia computer, with direct access to the internet.

Within two years, every school will have that access. This will apply to primary schools as well as secondary, since we believe that computer literacy must begin early.

Elements of Fianna Fáil's information age plan:

we will provide 100% funding to get information technology into schools in disadvantaged areas. This is critical to avoid opening up a new field of disadvantage, since students in these schools rarely have access to a computer at home.

We will make a special deal with telecom žireann for separate phone lines and low-cost internet access to schools.

We will give an annual budget to each school, for computer maintenance and running costs.

We will provide comprehensive in-career training programmes for teachers, so they can not only use computers effectively but also can integrate the

technology fully into their teaching in every curriculum area. All training for new teachers will give a high priority to using information technology in teaching.

We will create a dynamic partnership between the private sector and the department of education, to accelerate access by schools to the information age. It is in the long-term interest of many companies that Ireland has a fully computer-literate population, and we will leverage this fact to speed up the process. We will set up a national system to distribute used computers from the private sector to schools, and upgrade the role of the national information technology in education centre in promoting it in schools.

We will encourage and support the development of Irish-created education software, for both home and overseas markets.

We will stimulate the full use of internet-based education projects.

Creating the right telecommunications infrastructure

the key fact about the information age is that it is connected. Without the means to communicate instantly and cost-effectively, our human resources are powerless.

For this reason, Fianna Fáil believe it is a vital national interest that Ireland has a state-of-the-art communications infrastructure that provides us with high-quality global access at keenly competitive rates.

To reach our objectives, Ireland needs to be in the top quarter of developed countries for all the recognised service measures. But in fact, a recent oecd analysis showed that Ireland is in the top quarter for only two out of 13 measures. It is in the bottom quarter for four of the measures, and in the bottom half for seven out of the 13.

We have a long way to go, and under the rainbow government progress in this vital sector has stagnated.

Ireland was the last EU country to introduce competition in mobile phones.

A proper independent regulatory framework is still not in place.

Telecom žireannis strategic alliance has suffered grievously from prevarication and delay.

Telecommunications costs are still far too high, making it more difficult for Irish business to compete.

Where the rainbow government failed, Fianna Fáil will restore the momentum.

Forging the right strategic future for telecom žireann

the future of telecom ĩreann is central to the future of telecoms in Ireland, even in a fully competitive marketplace. It is therefore vital that its strategy for the future is the best for the company and for the national interest. Unfortunately, the way in which telecom ĩreann acquired a strategic partner is quite unsatisfactory, and Fianna Fail in government will revisit it.

There are four main issues:

the price paid by the new partners for their stake in telecom ĩreann. Only 183 million has been paid for a 20% stake, whereas only four years ago 500 million could have been raised for the sale of a minority stake.

The secrecy surrounding the deal. The rainbow government have stubbornly refused to divulge the terms of the deal or the conditions attaching to it. Fianna Fail believe this is totally unacceptable for the sale of such an important national asset. The secrecy gives rise to suspicions about what may have been conceded to the incoming investors.

The fear that the deal may be structured to encourage a quick investment profit, rather than the fullest development of a critical infrastructure resource. This makes it all the more important to know exactly what the terms were.

The representation of worker directors on the telecom ĩreann board, and the question of adequate employee shareholding. The rainbow government have reduced the number of the employees' voting directors, and have offered a 5% shareholding instead of the 15% the employees are prepared to pay for.

Fianna Fail in government will publish the terms of telecom ĩreann's strategic alliance deal with kpn and telia, subject only to the genuine requirements of commercial confidentiality.

Following publication of the details we will carry out an urgent re-examination of the deal, with a view to getting a better result for the taxpayer. We will negotiate a stronger deal that is of greater strategic benefit to the company and to the Irish nation.

We will maintain the number of worker directors on the telecom board at four. We will reserve for the telecom workforce the right to buy a stake of up to 15% in the company at a fair price.

With a view to refocusing the company's energy on its role in leading Ireland into the information age, Fianna Fail will

initiate immediately full-scale preparations to enable the company to compete effectively when the derogation from full competition is removed at the end of 1999.

Undertake an independent assessment of the feasibility of setting up a single

charging rate for calls made to anywhere on the island of Ireland. We believe that such a uniform rate would be a tremendous boost to business competitiveness, and encourage firms of all sizes to gear themselves up for the new way of doing business.

Rewarding the risk-takers

Fianna Fáil in government will take immediate action on six long-term industrial policy issues

supporting industry through better long-term planning

encourage entrepreneurship through the tax system

streamline the state's interface with business

give the same priority to sustaining jobs as to creating them

make life easier for the smaller business

double our national investment in training within five years

supporting industry through better long-term planning

in our first year in government, Fianna Fáil will address decisively these six key long-term issues:

we will create an action plan to implement the important Forde's report, shaping our future.

We will set up a national competitiveness council, to provide a permanent watchdog on this critical issue for the Irish economy. The council, which will include representatives of the social partners, will assess the implications of future EU directives and advise on implementation schedules for the current backlog of directives.

We will set up a commission to develop a strategy to deal with the likely contraction of EU funds for training, enterprise and infrastructure after 1999.

We will put in place a strategy to follow the expiry of the 10% rate of corporation profits tax in 2010 (2005 for Shannon and the IFSC). Fianna Fáil's long-term aim is to reduce corporation tax for all companies to 10% by 2010. On this basis we will make a case to the EU to cancel the present expiry dates.

We will comprehensively revamp industrial policy, to encourage a better spread of inward investment projects throughout the country; more location here by overseas

companies of key business functions such as marketing, research and product design; deeper linkages between Irish firms and multinationals; and greater exploitation of

opportunities for Irish firms in public procurement across the Eu.

We will set up a forum to harness the advice, skills and experience of the very high number of Irish scientists and technologists abroad as we reposition Ireland for the information age.

Encouraging enterprise through the tax system

we will establish a new òe-class of company shares, to free up the latent entreprenEurship of employees. This will make it attractive to vest a high proportion of the future value of a business in its employees. For those employees it will create a tax-free income stream and growth in underlying capital values, while protecting control and ownership by the business owner.

We will reward business owners who take risks and create sustained employment, with a reduction in their personal income tax related directly to the proportion of extra employment they create.

We will completely overhaul the tax refund seed capital scheme to ensure that it works. This adventurous scheme was created to encourage senior employees to start up their own enterprise, with seed capital provided through a refund of income taxes paid by them while in employment. The scheme is an almost total failure due to its cumbersome rules and administration.

We will give proprietary directors of companies a paye allowance, putting them on a par with everyone else.

We will change the tax rżgime on succession in family businesses, with rollover relief where the beneficiary is a full-time participant and has completed a relevant education course.

Fianna Fáil will aim towards a situation where profits under £100,000 are taxed at 25%, and profits between £100,000 and £250,000 are taxed at 30%. We will aim to bring in a 10% tax rate for the first £50,000 of profits of service firms. (At present the first £50,000 of company profits are taxed at 28%, the rest at 36%.)

we will further reduce employer and employee prsi (or levies) to improve competitiveness. We will fund these reductions principally through the buoyancy in the social insurance fund resulting from increased employment.

Streamlining the stateis interface with business

at present, there are more than 150 different agencies dealing with enterprise,

especially small and new start-up businesses. Grant aid for rural and urban development projects can come from as many as 50 different funds.

This jigsaw-puzzle of agencies and funds causes enormous confusion for entrepreneurs and wastes their time.

To end the chaos, Fianna Fáil will set up a one-stop-enterprise shop in each county, providing a single gateway to every state programme and grant aid.

We will do this through an existing structure, probably the county enterprise boards.

At national level, we believe there must be rationalisation of the number of agencies. To avoid the mistakes of hasty, ill-prepared mergers of the past, we will plan this carefully: we will establish common ground between the various bodies as a prelude to amalgamation, and enter into full discussions with the social partners before any final decisions are taken on rationalisation.

Our aim is to establish a single agency for small businesses and services, to replace all the existing structures supporting this sector. At government level, we will also streamline the interface with business. As many as eight ministers and ministers of state have responsibility at present for enterprise/business and employment matters.

We will bring trade into the enterprise and employment portfolio. Training and small business will have a big emphasis in a revamped enterprise department. We will set up two policy units in the department of enterprise and employment, one for small business and one for big business. For greater transparency, we will require the ida and other industrial promotion agencies to appear before oireachtas committees.

We will put in place a clear policy for managing the exit of the state's investment from firms. (Forbairt currently holds shares in 445 companies, representing a £65 million investment.)

giving higher priority to sustaining jobs

Fianna Fáil believe it is as important to sustain the jobs we have as it is to create new ones.

Last year, 13,180 new jobs were created by ida Ireland, but 6,000 existing jobs were lost.

Fianna Fáil believe that through prompt, effective action many jobs under threat could be saved.

We will upgrade the early warning system and the employment protection unit to detect difficulties at companies.

We will ensure that the ida works systematically with vulnerable industries to improve the performance of the Irish facility.

In the event of closure, we will insist that the IDA immediately gives priority to promoting the facility and workforce for alternative industry. In each case, we will set up special task forces to give targeted retraining to the workforce and gear their skills for new job opportunities.

Making life easier for smaller businesses

We will make more accessible the soft-loan schemes for small businesses, by lowering the minimum loan threshold to £10,000 (from the current £20,000).

We will, on request, give feedback to small and medium firms tendering for public sector contracts if their bid is not accepted.

We will require the FAIR to have a customer's charter, including an appeals process for companies refused funding.

We will implement the law that all state bodies pay their bills on time, and require all main contractors to government to pay their sub-contractors promptly.

We will consider a special court system that will allow for quick, inexpensive and effective legal remedies for non-payment of commercial debts.

We will put a statutory obligation on state bodies to minimise the amount of paperwork that has to be completed by small businesses and the public.

We will reduce the financial reporting requirements for targeted small and medium enterprises, whose circumstances change little from year to year.

We will hold an annual taoiseach's conference on small business, to keep this very important sector's concerns at the top of the national agenda.

Upgrading training for a changing workplace

Training our people for work and in work will be of even greater importance as the pace of industrial change accelerates.

Fianna Fáil will implement an urgent strategy to upgrade our national training in all respects.

Under this strategy, we will aim to double investment in training within five years.

Irish firms currently spend only 1.2% of annual turnover on training, compared to the EU norm of between 3% and 5%.

As part of the national training strategy, we will

publish detailed proposals on training. These will examine the future role of firms, and whether its industrial training function should be separated from its programmes for unemployed people.

Create a new system of nationally-certified traineeships, focused at those going directly from school into the workforce. They will have a broader scope than the present system of apprenticeships and cover a wider range of occupations. They will involve both on and off-the-job training. We will consult with employers and trade unions on the design and implementation of the scheme.

Extend tax relief for training to individuals. It currently is restricted to companies.

Creating a competitive tourism industry for the 21st century

Fianna Fáil in government will

chart a new strategic direction for Irish tourism, after the current investment programme

guarantee adequate investment in tourism facilities and in marketing

address recruitment and training deficiencies which threaten growth

protect our tourists from criminals

accelerate the growth of rural tourism

preserve the environment for tourism

setting a new strategic direction

the urgent challenge facing tourism is what strategies to follow after 1999, when the intensive investment supported by EU structural funds will end. Getting the answers right is vitally important to the economy as a whole: by the end of the decade there will be 200,000 people working in tourism and the sector will be generating annual revenues of £2.25 billion.

We will speedily agree with the industry new objectives and strategies for tourism up to the year 2005. The objectives will include a target for the percentage of gnp which the sector will contribute, and targets for new job numbers.

Our strategy will be geared above all to making Ireland an attractive destination for tomorrow's tourist.

It will be a priority to make tourism a year-round business and to ensure a better spread of tourism revenue throughout the country.

We will continue to market Ireland as a single destination in co-operation with the Northern Ireland tourist board.

Continuing to invest in tourism

the need for considerable spending on tourism will remain. There are two main issues: spending by Bord Fáilte, largely on attracting tourists, and investment spending which extends and renews the tourism product.

We will carry out an immediate review of Bord Fáilte spending, which has actually fallen over the past decade despite the mushrooming of tourism numbers and revenue, and a much more competitive world market. This review will set a target level of support for the sector up to the year 2000.

We have already been meeting the industry to address the issue of investment funding for tourism after 1999. Fianna Fáil in government will set up an industry and government group to produce speedy recommendations and strategies. We will consider tax incentives for tourism-related projects as part of this. We will publish an annual guide to supports for the tourism industry.

Attracting and training the right people

Bord Fáilte and Bord Fáilte will work closely together and with the industry to address recruitment and training deficiencies, which now threaten the sector's growth.

We will bring together employers and unions to develop a strategic plan for training, pay and conditions.

We will look at setting up training schools for the hospitality industry in key locations around the country, operating in the low season between November and March.

We will create new training programmes for tourist information officers and guides.

Ensuring that tourists are safe

Crime against tourists undermines the future of the industry, and we will target this specifically as part of Fianna Fáil's overall war against crime.

We will facilitate the prosecution of crimes against tourists by allowing the evidence of victims to be taken on video in their own country.

We will bring in exemplary penalties for persons who habitually prey on tourists.

We will increase television surveillance by the Gardaí in areas with high tourist traffic.

We will provide Garda information kiosks at significant tourist locations.

Marketing and presenting tourism facilities

to bring Irish tourism fully into the information age, Fianna Fáil will ensure that we have a national tourism database that is efficient, cost-effective and user-friendly. Accessible worldwide, it will handle both information and bookings.

An official annual guide for accommodation and restaurants will be produced.

We will create new national standards and specifications for signposting. This will include all general signposting and signposting related to areas of interest to visitors. We will aim to enhance the development of sustainable tourism by attractively-presented explanations of the significance of sites to visitors.

Interpretation will be encouraged as a means to enhance the tourism product. Interested parties will be urged to devise innovative and creative ways to provide interpretation besides visitor centres. We will implement the bord fáilte principles on visitor centres, and provide guidelines to relevant bodies to support these principles.

Accelerating the growth of rural tourism

Fianna Fáil will encourage community-led rural tourism initiatives. They will be given the expertise to advise them on the sustainable development of their areas.

We will encourage farming organisations to disseminate information among their members on the cultural value of field monuments, ring-forts and other archaeological monuments.

We will consider a rural cottage programme similar to that operated by the Northern Ireland tourism board: this could provide a source of income for farmers and others living in rural areas, and might attract EU funding as rural development and as an alternative to farming.

Protecting the environment

under Fianna Fáil, all tourist programmes will have a strong environmental dimension. Our twin aim is to preserve the environment for the tourist, and to preserve the environment for the nation.

We will revise planning laws to ensure that inappropriate visitor centres or buildings do not interfere with the character of heritage sites.

To develop more attractive cities and towns, we will encourage more pedestrianisation.

We will encourage local authorities to bring in more stringent design guidelines for housing developments in the countryside, and to nominate an environment officer to monitor the environmental impact of developments.

The concept of the carrying capacity of rural areas will be included in tourism development plans, which may use zoning to focus development in rural areas. As an alternative to general ribbon development in the countryside, local authorities will provide attractive sites in the immediate vicinity of towns and villages into which demand for sites will be channelled.

Local authorities will provide statutory protection for hedgerows. Advice on hedgerow trimming will be made available, so that it minimises the adverse effects on wildlife.

Agriculture, forestry and food

developing the full potential of Irish agriculture
Fianna Fáil in government will
ensure that agriculture, food and forestry becomes a top political priority
refocus the department of agriculture on its central mission developing the
right policies for Irish agriculture
rebuild consumer confidence in Irish food through an independent food quality
authority with full executive powers
encourage a total dedication to quality, from production right through to the
supermarket shelf
support the maximum number of farm families
ensure that agricultural production is environmentally sustainable
create an integrated land use policy through consultation
develop a commercial agriculture sector
reform the tax regime for farmers
stimulate rapid growth in the food industry
encourage growth in a carefully-managed forestry sector

agriculture and food are a cornerstone of the Irish economy, and Fianna Fáil are determined that they will remain so into the next century. Irish agriculture and its associated food industry has the potential to contribute to economic growth and rural prosperity.

But making this happen will require radical change. Strong effective leadership is vital.

Fianna Fáil has the experience, capacity and determination necessary to put in place the range of dynamic policies that will lead this great industry into a prosperous new century. The key elements of the Fianna Fáil strategy are set down in the position paper, a future in farming.

Reforming the department of agriculture
Fianna Fáil will carry out the most fundamental reform of the department since it was set up in 1900.

Our aim is to focus the department of agriculture on what we see as its central mission developing policy to ensure that Irish agriculture reaches its full potential in the 21st century. Developing this policy will become the main concern of the department under Fianna Fáil. The need for refocusing is urgent: the next round of negotiations to deal with the post-GATT era and the enlargement of the European union is imminent. For dairying and beef, which account for two thirds of our agricultural output, these negotiations will

start within months.

Fianna Fáil's reform will ensure that in future we become not policy takers but policy makers, based on a clear vision as to how our agriculture is to develop in the future. We will create a department with the capacity to put forward the best options to government and to implement all subsequent decisions effectively.

To allow the department to concentrate on its core function, we will set up an autonomous agency to control all payments to farmers. This agency will be under the policy direction of the minister and will have its own accounting officer. It will implement policy in these areas efficiently and cost effectively.

Rebuilding credibility in the quality of Irish food the rainbow government have responded hastily and quite inadequately to the real concerns of consumers, in Ireland and elsewhere, about food quality and safety.

The rainbow government's answer is simply to add another layer of bureaucracy a new inspectorate to oversee the existing inspectorates. That is a cosmetic solution to a major problem that threatens the entire future of Irish agriculture and food. It is a solution that because of its structure sitting on top of the existing mechanisms that have failed can never win the credibility necessary to carry out its function properly.

Fianna Fáil's approach, in contrast, is to go to the heart of the matter. We will set up a separate, totally-independent science-based body with total responsibility for guaranteeing the safety and quality of all food, and with all the powers and structure necessary to do so. Fianna Fáil's food quality authority will take over (not merely oversee) all current functions that relate to the regulation of the food industry, animal and plant health, approval of drugs and chemicals for use in food production, implementation of safety assurance schemes at farm and factory level and other related areas.

Without adding a further level of bureaucracy, it will take full and independent control of the relevant staff and other resources in the department of agriculture and a multiplicity of other agencies.

The food quality authority will, under the policy direction of the minister for food, have its own board and accounting officer, who will be independently accountable for implementing the standards set in EU regulations and national legislation.

So structured, it will be able to play a credible role in restoring consumer confidence in Irish food, on national and international markets.

Ensuring sustainable agricultural production we can never afford to be complacent about Ireland's green image, which is critical in marketing not only our food but the country as a whole for tourism and inward investment.

To maintain and enhance this image, Fianna Fáil will pursue sustainability in agriculture, via these objectives:

- conserving water, soil and genetic resources.

- Decreasing chemical inputs to the point where there is no adverse effect on sustainable production.

- Maintaining equilibrium between the input of nutrients and the absorption capacity of soils and plants.

Fostering rural environment management, maintaining bio-diversity and natural habitats, and minimising natural risks like erosion and fires.

Creating an integrated land use policy through consultation land is our single most valuable resource. But conflicts are now arising on how this land is used for the maximum benefit of the people of Ireland.

A variety of interests, from forestry to farming, from conservationists to industries attempting to generate wealth from our limited natural resources, are trying to operate within current piecemeal policies. Genuine local concerns are not being met through adequate consultation and involvement in the decision making process.

Fianna Fáil will develop an integrated land use policy following a comprehensive consultation process.

This will ensure

- that agriculture can continue to develop but in a sustainable manner;
- that special areas of conservation are effectively implemented, but with due regard for those residing in and earning a living in these areas;
- that appropriate forestry development is facilitated.

We will review the entire present range of environmental and development measures as part of this process.

Developing a commercial agricultural sector Ireland has clear competitive advantages in grass-based agriculture and in dairying in particular, but. Current policies do not allow these advantages to be exploited. Progressive farmers must have the opportunity of meeting clearly-expressed market demands for their products. Fianna Fáil will set up a new partnership between the department of agriculture, Teagasc, farm organisations and food processors to develop this section of the industry. A focused research, training and advisory programme, supported by market research, will underpin this.

Supporting the greatest possible number of family farms the future viability of tens of thousands of smaller farms, especially dry stock farms, is being undermined by the present system of income supports. Despite the very large sums of money currently paid out, these farmers do not have viable incomes.

Some 70% of farmers get only 30% of direct payments. Some 57,000 farmers receive less than £40 a week in direct payments, while at the other end of the scale 1,000 farmers get direct payments of £60,000 and upwards each year.

Fianna Fáil will reform the existing direct payments scheme. This will ensure a more equitable distribution of support payments, enhancing the viability of thousands of threatened farm families and making more efficient the administration of direct payments.

Young farmers. With stringent supply controls in all major areas of farming, young farmers taking over relatively underdeveloped holdings have very limited development options. In the renegotiation of EU policy, Fianna Fáil will ensure that adequate provision is made to ensure access to quotas or production rights by qualified new entrants. We will support stamp duty exemption for young farmers taking over family holdings.

Women in agriculture. The key contribution of women in agriculture has largely gone unrecognised. The voice of women in

agriculture is virtually unheard due to lack of representation. Fianna Fáil will set up a special advisory committee to advise on and monitor progress with policy initiatives to support women in agriculture. These will include setting up a network of women in farming, and addressing the specific training requirements of women in agriculture.

Reforming the tax system

grants for pollution control and the development of alternative enterprises have gone to people who already have significant taxable incomes, while at the same time there is inadequate funding for on-farm investment on smaller farms. Many larger farmers can avail of tax relief for investments off farms, but not for investment on their holdings.

Fianna Fáil will put in place a new scheme of development incentives. Farmers with taxable incomes will be encouraged to avail of tax relief for on-farm investment purposes and for the development of alternative enterprises. The limited grant-aid available will be targeted at smaller farmers with low incomes.

Stimulating rapid growth in our food industry

everyone involved in the Irish food industry can be rightly proud of the sectors tremendous achievements over the past decade. Fianna Fáil in government will put in place a wide range of structures and incentives to stimulate further rapid growth in our premier indigenous industry.

Recognising the ever-increasing competitiveness

and standards of the international marketplace, our comprehensive policies place a particular focus on creating an exciting environment of increasing opportunities for producers, processors and distributors.

The key elements of the Fianna Fáil strategy

for the food industry are detailed in our two position papers food a blueprint for optimal development, and securing the integrity of Irish food.

They include:

- re-establishing the office of food, set up by Fianna Fáil in 1987;
- restoring consumer confidence through an autonomous food quality authority;
- initiating an investment programme in the beef processing industry, to improve its competitiveness and efficiency;

- encouraging a significant increase in product innovation within the dairy industry;

- dynamically expanding the pigmeat industry, the prepared consumer foods sector, and the emerging food ingredients sector.

- Reinforcing the marketing drive for Irish food to maintain existing markets and to secure new ones, through support for specific marketing initiatives by an *bord bia*;

- implementing a comprehensive and integrated environmental programme, including treatment of agricultural waste and by-products, and the humane management of livestock and poultry;

- launching a national human resources programme to ensure the ready availability of strategic managers, skilled in the various sub-specialities within the food industry and with multi-lingual skills;

- providing an incentive package to assist in the necessary upgrading of abattoirs, as a component of the overall emphasis on food quality and safety;

- giving priority to r&d investment in horticulture, which is still under-performing despite some notable successes. We will support a substantial development project for value-added products, research new processing

technologies for field vegetables and mushrooms, and pilot test new crops to identify new commercial opportunities.

Encouraging growth in a carefully-managed forestry sector
Fianna Fáil is committed to a forest industry
that is both environmentally friendly and financially viable, and which
exploits Ireland's comparative advantage in growing trees.

We will:

encourage a high level of tree planting, with a proper balance of deciduous
and broad leaf;

seek a proper balance between independent farmer forestry and other forestry,
recognising that the plantation has a role to play in supplementing farm
incomes;

insist on proper maintenance and management as a condition for the draw-down
of all premiums, to encourage a high quality crop with the maximum potential for
added value;

set up a management system for the supply of timber to the processing
industry, to sustain the maximum number of jobs.

We will prepare a sustainable forestry plan,
addressing all the environmental issues. All plantations will be controlled
with regard to their impact on agriculture, the environment, local communities
and property. We will bring in a code of practice, in co-operation with
interested groups including farmers, for the management of forests and
plantations.

Public notices will be required before
planting, to protect natural habitats and watercourses from side-effects and
communities and residences from the danger of forest fires. All grants for
plantations over 20 hectares will be subject to permission from the relevant
authorities. All clear-felled land will be replanted within a time limit to
prevent visual blight. We will control wild-life shooting licences in forestry
and will designate some plantations as bird sanctuaries.

Marine

harnessing our marine resources

Fianna Fáil in government will

fight to retain our existing fish quotas and seek to upgrade our fleet

make the industry attractive to providers of capital

seek to develop a mid-water white fish fleet

maximise the amount of fish processed to second or higher level

transfer smaller harbours to local control

develop aquaculture in a fair, equitable and environmentally-conscious way.

Protect and develop our coast through a new coastal zone management authority

develop a strategic policy for Irish commercial shipping and harbours

fighting to preserve our fishing industry

Fianna Fáil are committed to maintaining our

existing fish quotas and will fight for preferential treatment for our coastal
communities, as these are in every sense of the word peripheral regions.

Any attempt to reduce the fleet tonnage, as has

been proposed by the EU, would result in a drastic reduction in fishery-related
employment for our coastal communities. The importance of fishing to Ireland is

not just that it provides employment for 15,000 and earns £150 million a year, but that it does this in communities where there is very little other economic activity.

The need for Ireland's fishing industry is to grow, both at sea and in on-shore processing activities.

Instead of downsizing, Fianna Fáil believe that

Ireland must fight for the right to upgrade our fleet, which we should be replacing with an equivalent new tonnage. In addition, any spare tonnage bought from retiring fishermen should be allocated to young skippers qualifying from our training schools, as this is the only way we can bring more young qualified fishermen into the industry.

Our fishing industry is still grossly

under capitalised, lacking in professional management, and with little or no involvement by Irish banks or investment funds. To bring about change in the industry we must ensure the best possible training for our fishermen and make the industry attractive to providers of capital..

Fianna Fáil will look at the possibility of

extending eligibility to projects for the replacement of fishing vessels up to 20 metres.

To remain commercial in demersal fishing within

the EU, we recognise that we must develop a mid-water, white fish fleet, capable of fishing the porcupine and the rockall banks in all weather.

Fish harvesting. The Irish ratio of shore to

sea jobs is extremely low at one and a half to one, whereas in other EU countries the ratio is as high as seven to one. Fianna Fáil are committed to encouraging the necessary investment in order to increase employment and to guarantee the survival of the secondary processing industry.

To achieve this, it is vital that we maximise

the volume of fish processed to a second or higher level. Only 77% of fish caught in our waters is landed here for processing, and only 20% of the fish processed is of high added-value. Fianna Fáil believe this mix must be changed if we are to maintain employment in fish processing.

Fianna Fáil are committed to delivering the

necessary investment in order to ensure the survival and growth of the secondary processing industry. we will encourage the landing of all Irish catches at Irish ports, and other EU-registered vessels will be encouraged to do the same.

Harbours. Fianna Fáil believe that in addition

to the planned upgrading of the 25 larger harbours, a long-term programme must be initiated whereby a large number of the smaller harbours are transferred to the local county councils and community for development for fishing, leisure and tourist activity.

Aquaculture. The uncontrolled development of

this industry must be rectified. Fianna Fáil will implement existing legislation or modify it as necessary to ensure that a fair and equitable system is put in place, and environmental concerns are addressed in this £50 million industry.

Seaweed. Fianna Fáil will bring in legislation

to allow the semi-state company arramara teoranta to develop the environmentally friendly seaweed industry to its full potential.

Safety. Fianna Fáil will implement the

recommendations of the fishery vessel safety review group on vessel safety and

the training of deck hands. To speed up the location and rescue of vessels in distress, we will also examine the possibility of equipping all fishing vessels with an electronic locating device.

A strategy policy for shipping and harbours
Fianna Fáil will develop a comprehensive policy for the shipping industry. Our trade, both import and export, is virtually all carried by sea in containers, bulk or roll-on roll-off ferries.

It is vital that as a nation we take a strategic view of the Irish shipping industry, and develop the necessary infrastructure to handle the expected increases in volume over the next decade. This will require investment in access to ports and continuing investment in the ports themselves to handle increased volumes and larger ships.

Fianna Fáil will encourage continued investment in modern tonnage by Irish companies in Irish-flagged ships employing Irish and EU citizens.

This will mean ensuring that Irish companies are not disadvantaged competitively and that Irish ports are encouraged to be competitive in their pricing structure and commercial in their operations.

Fianna Fáil will consult widely with the industry to ensure that all aspects of the vital lifeline to trade are understood and developed.

Protecting and developing our coast
Ireland's coast is a major national resource.

It has huge potential from many perspectives economic, environmental and sociological. Managed properly, it is a national asset of immense value.

To realise this potential, Fianna Fáil in government will implement a 10-year plan to:

protect the high quality of the coastal environment.

Refurbish coastlines at risk.

Develop tourism, fishing and leisure facilities in coastal regions.

We will achieve these objectives by setting up a coastal zone management authority. It will be responsible for all coastal matters and have a regulatory role in coastal zone development.

Semi-state companies

re-creating a dynamic state sector

Fianna Fáil in government will take a practical rather than an ideological approach to state companies, working in the spirit of social partnership and consensus re-establish the companies as engines of growth make them viable for the long-term in an era of EU-required competition provide additional capital where necessary by broadening the shareholding base to include employees, pension funds, individual Irish investors, as well as strategic partners

give them the commercial freedoms necessary to compete effectively, while ensuring that their role as public service providers is maintained encourage them to grow overseas so as to achieve economies of scale

rejecting ideology in favour of practicality
Fianna Fáil's aim is to reinvigorate the state

enterprises and to create a new renaissance in the sector. Our policy towards the semi-state sector has always been practical rather than ideological.

Our philosophy and track-record has consistently been to support semi-state companies as engines of economic growth. These companies have played a vital role in Ireland's modernisation, and include some of our most outstanding enterprises.

Fianna Fáil believe this role should continue.

In our view, a healthy economy will include a healthy evolving state sector that seeks to achieve continuous improvements in all-round competitiveness, and enhancing the quality of service given to the public.

Fianna Fáil will not engage in a wholesale dismantling or disposal of state companies.

We will not sell off state assets cheap to make quick profits for investors, at the cost of higher prices to the consumer and/or a lowering of service quality.

Creating a strategy that is right for Ireland

Fianna Fáil will be forward-looking, not defensive, about the future strategic development of semi-state companies. It is a time of change in the state sector, change that is being driven by technology, by EU deregulation and competition. It is firm EU policy to insist on competition in all areas now covered by commercial semi-state companies.

Fianna Fáil believe that competition is good

for the economy. We are opposed to non-essential monopolies in the long-term, be they private or public, and we are confident that state companies have the potential to meet any competition facing them. We will work to make them efficient and profitable, underpinning their viability for the long-term.

But Fianna Fáil will not force efficient

companies into structural contortions, just so as to fit some EU design tailored for much larger economies. Our regeneration of the semi-state sector will take into account the size of the Irish market. Fianna Fáil will vigorously pursue what is in the national interest and we will fight our corner in negotiating EU directives to make sure we get the type of competitive régime we can live with.

Meeting the need for new capital

a further impetus towards change is that many of the companies have considerable capital needs. It is not realistic to expect the taxpayer to fund further large injections of capital even if the EU allowed it.

Fianna Fáil will allow state companies needing

capital to look to Irish pension funds, on the basis of a long-term investor relationship. We will consider the option of strategic alliances abroad on their merits, case by case.

In broadening the shareholding in semi-state

companies, we will look beyond pension funds and strategic partners to include individual Irish investors and also to the employees of these companies. We see employee shareholdings as an important element in the successful management of change in the semi-state sector. Fianna Fáil will reserve for workers in state companies the right to buy up to 15 per cent of the shares at a fair price.

We will guarantee effective national control of

vital utilities, as long as is necessary, generally by continued state majority shareholding or in other cases through the golden shares mechanism.

The public service ethos will not be lost sight of, but we will ensure that it is genuine and not an excuse for inefficiency or inferior quality. We believe in facing the challenges together in a co-operative spirit and maintaining the relationship of trust which Fianna Fáil has fostered with the social partners. The transition from monopoly status to competitive market player is a demanding one for state companies, and Fianna Fáil is committed to fully involving managements, unions and the social partners generally in the process.

Giving the companies freedom to grow if the state companies are to perform and succeed in an open market, then they must have commercial freedoms on a par with their competitors. Fianna Fáil will provide those freedoms. By the same token, the cost of public service obligations, which are proper and unavoidable, must be borne by all the players in the market not just the state companies. Fianna Fáil will make this happen.

The future competitive marketplace for state companies cannot be restricted to Ireland. State companies, like any others, need to achieve economies of scale in an increasingly global economy. Fianna Fáil will therefore seek to develop the potential of some of the restructured state companies as Irish multinational enterprises with significant overseas sales opportunities.

We will support their development overseas in the same way as growing Irish indigenous companies: Some companies such as AerRianta, ESB and Telecom have already developed overseas in a modest way. Fianna Fáil will make it government policy to promote them as multi-national operators and encourage them to expand through active strategies overseas.

Preserving and extending our inheritance

organising for sustainable development

creating new opportunities in arts and heritage

polasa' ' leith na gaeilge agus pobal na gaeilge.

Organising for sustainable development

Fianna Fáil in government will

promote sustainable development across the whole of government, ensuring that policy in all departments is eco-audited for sustainability

involve the whole community in environment policy through a new national environment partnership forum

develop and implement an integrated environmental policy

improve the planning process

make recycling a reality in waste management

wage a war on litter

control the environmental impact of traffic

take priority action in agriculture, energy and tourism

act vigorously on the environment at international level

Fianna Fáil believe the time has now come to develop and implement an integrated environmental policy that unites our people behind the concept of sustainable development.

Under successive governments over the past 30 years, Ireland's response to environmental concerns has been piecemeal and ineffective. Much of it has been driven by the need to meet European standards, rather than by a widely-held conviction that preserving our environment is in our individual and collective self-interest.

N weighty legislation was introduced against a background of looming dead-lines, with little real discussion or consultation.

N regulation was introduced without any analysis of its impact on national competitiveness. A blanket approach to regulation has made it harder to address properly the specific environmental problems posed by individual sectors. N too often, industrial development has generated conflict and misunderstanding with results that have benefited neither the environment nor economic development.

N decision-making on environmental issues has lacked transparency, with excessive barriers placed on access to information by concerned citizens.

N environmental policy has not been integrated across the whole of government. Nor has there been effective co-ordination of the overall effort. Agencies involved in environment protection have been created ad hoc, with the inevitable result that resources are deployed ineffectively and inefficiently.

Elements of a new approach

integrating industrial and environmental policy. Fianna Fáil want to achieve a holistic integration of industrial and environment policy. Treating pollution and waste after it has been produced must be a last resort. In-process recycling, re-use of waste, product alteration, input substitution and process change must be sought across the board.

Environmental programmes will with consultation be introduced for each industry sector. Only the highest standards of clean technology will be allowed in new

developments. Improvements in existing facilities will be addressed on a sectoral basis.

Consensus through consultation. To ensure maximum involvement by all those interested in and affecting the environment, a new national environment partnership forum will have a major input into all public policy impacting on the environment.

Each local authority will draw up an environmental charter after community-wide consultation. This consultation will take place through a local environmental partnership forum involving all relevant statutory and non-statutory bodies, as well as the community/voluntary sector. The local authority will submit sustainable development plans to this forum.

Transparency. Fianna Fáil will provide all citizens with full and easy access to information held by public authorities on environmental matters, to create greater awareness of these issues and enhance the policy-making process. All aspects of regulation including environmental impact assessments, grants to industry and the planning process will be made totally transparent.

A lead from the public sector. The public sector will lead by example. Each government department will have a specific high-ranking officer assigned to ensure that all policies are sustainable. All public bodies will have a rigorous system of environmental audit. Firms doing business with government will have to comply with certifiable environmental standards. State grants will be dependent on compliance with environmental standards. Local authorities will encourage and assist recycling projects, recycled materials and green consumerism

rationalising the role of state agencies. The environmental protection agency will focus its resources on enforcement. Forbairt will withdraw from providing environmental consultancy to focus on job creation, especially in the £150 billion environmental protection industry. We will integrate the environmental management function of the NSAI and the national accreditation board.

Monitoring progress. We will put a structure in place to assess the impact of new environmental regulations, and to review the effectiveness of existing legislation and EU funded programmes on the environment.

Improving the planning process

Fianna Fáil will carry out an urgent examination of all planning law and practices, because of their considerable influence on the natural and built environment.

We will review and consolidate all planning and development legislation, after consultation with interested parties. We will review all current regulations on exempted developments, and institute severe penalties for unauthorised developments.

N we will make statutory provision for a pre-planning process between planner and the applicant.

We will increase the number of professionally qualified planners, and create the resources to address large scale or specialised planning applications.

N we will create a transparent appeals system, and give applicants recourse to legal redress for delay due to vexatious or nuisance appeals. We will make it possible to appeal costs without invalidating the whole permission.

Making recycling a reality in waste management

Ireland produces waste at a rate far beyond what is sustainable.

Failure on recycling. Ireland's rate of recycling is well below the European norm, yet most of our waste contains large amounts of material which could be recovered either for recycling or reuse.

Fianna Fáil believe that the present largely voluntary arrangements for recycling are totally inadequate. They could never address the recycling option properly, especially in the face of the rising volumes of waste.

As with other areas of environmental protection, there is an uncoordinated approach to waste management. A national plan, co-ordinated by one body, is essential. Fianna Fáil in government will deliver this.

We will set higher and more verifiable targets for the recycling of packaging and industrial waste. We will review the voluntary repack scheme.

The crisis in landfill. It is a symptom of our national failure in waste management that landfill remains the primary method for the disposal of waste. This cannot continue.

Within the lifetime of the next d'áil, 67 of the 99 landfill sites operated by local authorities will be full.

Fianna Fáil will implement a waste hierarchy of

n prevention

n minimisation

n recycling

n waste-to-energy

n disposal

only when all other options are exhausted, will we allow landfill to be considered.

We will introduce new standards for the management of landfill and fees for landfill disposal will reflect the polluter pays principle. Fees from landfill sites will be partly used to mitigate their impact on the surrounding community.

We will levy a tax on plastic bags, pet bottles and other containers that end up in landfill and as litter. The object of this tax will be to discourage use of these materials to the maximum possible extent.

We will instruct local authorities to move towards having household and commercial waste segregated for collection and recycling.

We will require the industrial development agencies to seek out and give priority to projects that use raw materials derived from waste.

Waging a war on litter

as a country we spend £20 million each year to clean up litter, yet we still have a very serious litter problem. The amount of litter strewn along our city streets, highways, hedgerows, and even in the most isolated regions is a national scandal and a real threat to our tourism industry.

Fianna Fáil will review existing laws on litter and waste, and where necessary strengthen them. Equally important, however, we will consistently enforce existing laws which does not happen now.

Measuring and rewarding performance. We will introduce a system to measure litter. We will grade areas on their litter performance under a green flag scheme, along the lines of the blue flag scheme for beaches.

Litter from packaging. All establishments doing business with the public will have to conform to litter management plans drawn up by each local authority. These plans will include providing bins, segregating refuse and cleaning litter from the vicinity throughout the hours of trading.

We will require fast-food outlets to have a licence, and failure to control litter properly will be grounds for refusing renewal. We will introduce an environmental takeaway charge, whose proceeds will go to clean up litter.

We will oblige all businesses above a certain size to facilitate recycling, at levels to be set by annual and medium-term targets. We will ensure that producers of bottles and cans, as well as retailers including the licensed trade, will take cradle-to-grave responsibility for these products.

Public events. We will require events such as pop concerts to lodge a clean-up bond with the local authority and demonstrate their capacity to clean up as the event proceeds and not merely afterwards.

Pollution by advertisements. We will require advertising structures to have an annual licence and conform to specifications. In cases of illegal advertising, the firm whose name or product is advertised will be held responsible and fined. Fines will be related to the clean-up cost.

Abandoned cars. We will make the last owner of a vehicle liable if the vehicle

becomes a nuisance.

We will set up environmental courts, following the model of the special traffic courts. Convictions will be publicised in the local media. We will use fines and local licence fees for environmental protection to pay the cost of enforcement and for clean up purposes.

Controlling the environmental impact of traffic

Fianna Fáil will reduce the amount of vehicle traffic in urban areas, by making other alternatives more attractive. Less traffic will lower air and noise pollution, and increase everyone's quality of life.

We will create a traffic management plan for every urban area, with full consultation and voluntary input. We will appoint a traffic supremo to co-ordinate traffic control in the cities in liaison with related agencies.

As part of co-ordinated traffic management, we will

- n encourage car sharing, initially within the public sector,

- n improve enforcement of bus lanes;

- n create a programme to extend cycle lanes in all cities;

- n encourage towns and villages to reduce parking areas that cause congestion;

- n promote park and ride in cities, using rapid public transport from parking areas on the outskirts;

- n make full use of clamping, towing and fines to curb illegal parking in cities and their suburbs;

- n ban deliveries in city centres between 7am and 7pm on weekdays;

- n encourage pedestrianisation by making cities safer and more pleasant to walk in, and enshrine pedestrians' rights in a pedestrian charter;

- n oblige Dublin bus to reduce exhaust emissions by 50%.

Implementing environmental policy across government

Fianna Fáil will make the environment a priority concern that affects all the business of government. Individual departments will pursue a vigorous environmental programme, with an integrating and co-ordinating role provided by the minister for the environment.

A cabinet sub-committee will ensure the implementation of environmental policy.

For details of our specific policy initiatives on the environment in

agriculture, energy and tourism, see the sections of this manifesto dealing with those sectors.

Educating for sustainable development

In Fianna Fáil will incorporate environmental education, particularly the concepts of sustainable development into primary and secondary level curricula.

Now we will set up a task force under the higher education authority what educational changes are necessary to meet Ireland's needs in the new ecological age.

Now the department of enterprise and employment will identify the training needs required by changes brought about by environment legislation.

Now to stimulate demand for products that are more environmental friendly through information and through consistent standards in labelling, packaging and advertising, we will develop and promote an Irish eco-label, and encourage industry to extend the use of eco-labelling generally.

Developing the fire services

Fianna Fáil believe the health and safety of the public is of paramount importance at all times. Accordingly, we will in government work to develop further the nation's fire services. We will update the fire services act and review the funding allocated to the fire services. We will encourage a multi-agency approach to training and drills, and will aim for the highest standards of equipment and training. We will encourage bilateral plans with fire authorities north of the border.

Acting vigorously on the environment at international level

In government, Fianna Fáil will work to ensure that existing international agreements on the regulation of the nuclear industry are strengthened. We will question the economics as well as the safety of nuclear power, and urge a moratorium on the building of new nuclear power stations and the phasing out of existing facilities. Side by side with this, we will promote the exploration of alternative energies, as well as more efficient energy use.

Now non-nuclear countries have very little protection under international conventions against the world nuclear industry. Fianna Fáil believes that EU and international law should ensure that :

Now every nuclear state has an independent, effective and credible authority to supervise its nuclear industry.

Now there is a peer review provision allowing other states to verify assurances.

The nuclear industry, and the states in which they operate, must be totally liable for any accidents and the consequences across international borders.

Adequate funds must be bonded to meet this.

N neighbouring states must be allowed to object effectively before a competent international forum, to the building of a nuclear facility.

N EU laws should ensure that the polluter pays principle is fully enforced in relation to the discharges from existing nuclear facilities.

Sellafield. Sellafield and other British nuclear installations pose a deadly threat to our health and safety. Fianna Fáil in government will vigorously pursue all avenues to have Sellafield and its sister stations shut. We have for more than ten years consistently advocated the closure of these plants, and have been prime movers in all the progress made to date. We will not rest until the matter is finally settled to Ireland's satisfaction.

Creating new opportunities in arts and heritage

Fianna Fáil in government will

stimulate the arts throughout the country

encourage diversity and fair competition in broadcasting

accelerate the growth of the film and television industry

establish Ireland as a world centre for the music industry

give a high priority to conserving our heritage

stimulating the arts throughout the country

Fianna Fáil have always had an enlightened approach to the arts. We will continue to ensure that the arts are properly funded; and in particular that we continue to build up throughout the country a vibrant infrastructure of arts centres, museums and theatres.

To stimulate the development of the arts at local level throughout the country, we will require all local authorities to produce three-year cultural development plans. We will also require local authorities to spend a fixed minimum proportion of their budget on capital projects relating to the arts.

We will by 1998 bring arts council funding to the £26 million target set out in the arts plan, a year ahead of the rainbow government's schedule. We will intensify efforts to obtain EU funding for the arts, especially those with cross-border or strong European dimensions, and pursue all opportunities under EU cultural and tourism programmes.

N we will require the arts council to shorten decision times on funding applications and to introduce a feedback scheme for unsuccessful applicants.

N we will require the arts council to give greater consideration to the disabled arts.

N the regions will be taken into account in making appointments to the arts council.

N a national cultural institutions council will be established to act as a forum for direct contact and discussion between the minister for arts and the heritage council, the arts council, aoidfna, the directors of the national cultural institutions, etc.

N Fianna Fáil will make the development of the national library and national museum a priority.

N we will require the national cultural institutions to have outreach programmes with the community to give wider appreciation of their roles and work.

N we will streamline the abbey theatre's relationship with its principal sponsor, the state. We recognise the need to review the arrangements for the funding of the national theatre, with reference to current funding arrangements for other national cultural institutions such as the national concert hall and imma.

N we will fund a survey to determine future strategy for theatre development.

N we support the development in dublin of a centre for the performing arts, with a conservatoire at its core. Music, dance, comedy, opera and other arts would have a place at the centre. While the capital costs and sustainability of the venture will have to be carefully examined, Fianna Fáil is in favour of such a major initiative, especially as a millennium-type project.

Encouraging diversity and fair competition in broadcasting

we will implement legislation to protect major domestic sporting events for viewing on rtŕ and tv3. We will give teilif's na gaeilge statutory independence and freedom to add to its broadcasting hours. We will provide it with separate funding, and work to overcome the present reception problems. We will hold a public competition for the unused hours of transmission time on tnag.

We will ensure that rtŕ puts greater emphasis on regional coverage in news and programmes and provide more television drama, documentaries and coverage of the arts.

Creating the right structures.

We will not create the cumbersome broadcasting mega-authority proposed by the rainbow

government, as we believe it would blur the desirable demarcation between public service broadcasting and the independent commercial sector.

To answer the real needs of the sector, we will instead set up a new broadcasting advisory council to advise on changes in legislation, development of local radio, technological change, foreign competition and the rapidly developing pay-per-view phenomenon in television sports broadcasting.

Encouraging competition. We support competition in broadcasting, and we want tv3 to succeed. We will ensure that rt  responds fairly to the new station. Equally, we support the new national radio service and wish it success. We will establish arbitration for disputes between commercial operators and rt  over transmission facilities and costs. Under Fianna F il rt  will remain responsible for its transmission facilities, as we believe that hiving them off to a separate body would be inefficient and wasteful.

On the mmds controversy, Fianna F il have had detailed discussions with both the community tv representatives and the mmds companies. We believe that if the complicated legal and technical difficulties can be resolved, provision should be made for licensing both systems. We are in favour of fair competition in the area, and in government will move urgently to resolve the issues.

Fostering independent radio. We believe that a thriving independent radio sector is a vital part of the national media mix, and we will ensure that it does not have to labour under any special handicaps.

The independent radio sector pays a levy of 3 per cent of its annual income to the irtc to fund the commission's costs. As recommended in our document on broadcasting, we will abolish this levy, and the irtc will be directly funded by the exchequer.

Fianna F il will support further programme development schemes for local radio. This will be for public service broadcasting and programme development. Grants for capital expenditure and funding for on-going costs will be made available where local stations have to develop and maintain multiple transmission sites. The exchequer will allocate a fund of  500,000 for this purpose.

We will require f s to work with the radio sector to develop training programmes.

Accelerating growth in the film and television industry

a screen commission will be set up to continue the development of the industry. We will review the film board with a view to giving it a broader and more relevant remit. We believe the board should be involved in developing television drama, be more active in sales and marketing, and take responsibility, through the screen commission, for publicising Ireland as a location for international film makers.

We will require the film board to encourage co-production between Irish and European producers. At present, Ireland has only one co-production treaty, with Canada. The board will also work closely with RTÉ in encouraging the independent sector.

Restoring the catalyst of tax incentives. Fianna Fáil will examine the effect of the restrictions placed on section 35 by the rainbow government. Our intention is to extend these provisions rather than to restrict them, as we believe they are a powerful stimulus to the film industry. We will also bring in a new tax relief for script and project development. We will arrange for the revenue commissioners to issue a statement of practice for the film industry, to avoid the uncertainty that currently arises from differing practices by individual inspectors.

An industry think-tank that embraces all. There is a clear need for an industry think-tank that will set policy and monitor ongoing developments. At the moment, the nearest body to this is the committee of state agencies with responsibilities affecting film and television. Fianna Fáil will abolish this committee and replace it with an industry-wide think-tank with representation from all. In order to stimulate the widest possible debate, the new body will publish promptly the outcome of its meetings.

Educating for film. Fianna Fáil will draw up a new film training and education plan. Elements of this will include:

• examining the feasibility of setting up in Ireland a film school of world class, which would attract international students and provide the best possible training for Irish people. Such a school could possibly be a partnership between the private and public sectors.

• encouraging closer co-operation between the film and television industry and colleges offering courses related to it.

• creating a mix of short courses and workshops to deal with creative and entrepreneurial development and training for technicians.

Establishing Ireland as a world centre for the music industry

Fianna Fáil believe that Ireland has significant comparative advantages in the talent and achievements of its music industry. There is enormous further potential for Ireland as a world-class international music centre, extending our activities into all aspects of this rapidly-changing global industry.

Fianna Fáil believe that Ireland has the potential to become a world centre for the production, storage and electronic distribution world wide, of music.

We envisage a broadly-based industry, extending not only to the creation and performance of all kinds of music, but also to the business side such as treasury operations, data processing, telesales, completion of record and publishing deals, legal services.

What we did for financial services in 1987, we now propose for the music industry in 1997. Fianna Fáil will inject the same dynamism to the development of Ireland as an international music centre as we did to the ifsc.

Our policy will be typified by harnessing the energies of the private and public sectors, by a willingness to pass quickly the necessary laws and regulations to underpin the strategy, and by effective professional promotion.

What is now needed is a political driving force to animate all these disparate elements, as part of a national strategy for the music industry. Fianna Fáil will provide that driving force. Recent figures show the Irish music industry has an output value of about £160 million and employs 10,000 people (full-time equivalents).

Among the elements needed are:

- n a national centre for the performing arts

- n world class residential recording studios

- n digital music libraries capable of distributing music and visual material internationally

- n a campaign to attract world class producers and performers to Ireland.

Fianna Fáil will, immediately on entering government, set up a music board with overall responsibility for implementing the music industry strategy. Membership will include the key contributors to the strategy from both public and private sectors.

Giving a high priority to conserving our heritage

in recent years we have devoted considerable national effort and resources to stimulating the arts in Ireland with spectacular results. Fianna Fáil believe that the time has now come to give a higher priority to conserving our heritage. We see stimulating the arts and conserving our heritage as two essential elements of an overall cultural policy.

We will

- n develop a national heritage plan, and require each local authority to develop a heritage plan to complement the national strategy.

- N allocate a specific proportion of lottery funding to heritage.

- N examine the opportunities for partnership arrangements with the commercial sector on funding of heritage, and assess the need for any special tax incentives.

- N set up a national statutory inventory of architectural heritage.

N re-establish the independence and status of the chief herald and allow maximum public access to the genealogical office.

N develop a strategy for a national museums service.

N put in place a revolving fund for heritage towns, so they can provide matching funds for initiatives to preserve and enhance their heritage.

N encourage the setting up of local heritage committees to act as advisory groups for local authorities.

N put in place a fully-transparent system of consultation and compensation in relation to the designation of special protection areas and special areas of conservation.

N review the position of the national archives in the light of the new challenges it faces under the freedom of information act. We will reinstate the resources for national women's archive and resource centre. An outreach programme by the national archives will help public bodies, churches, political parties, in maintaining records. The local authority archival service will also be improved.

N we will provide a package of tax incentives for refurbishment of Georgian houses for residential purposes.

Polasaê I leith na gaeilge agus pobal na gaeilge

Í buna'odh p'irt' fhianna f'íl t' sl'nœ na gaeilge agus caomhnœ phobal na gaeltachta agus na gaeilge mar l'raidhm againn. Glacaimid leis mar cheart bunœsach go mbeadh f'íl ag gach saor'nach, thuaidh agus theas, ar a chuid oidhreachta, tr'n gc-ras oideachais agus ' ngach gn'ž eile den saol.

Mar sin tugann Fianna Fáil l'n-taca'ocht do ghluaiseachta' agus dieagra'ocha' na gaeilge, agus do mhœineadh na gaeilge sa ch-ras oideachais. Le bunœ =dar's na gaeltachta, bord na gaeilge, raidi- na gaeltachta, gaelscoileanna agus teilifis na gaeilge, l'zirigh Fianna Fáil go praiticiœil go nd'zanfaidh siad beart de r'zir gh'nna phobal na gaeilge, agus go dteasta'onnn -n bp'irt' gach cœnamh c-ir gur f'zidir a thabhairt do thionscnaimh fhicentacha sa ghaeltacht, agus lasmuigh de.

Moltaê fhianna f'íl

taca'onnn Fianna Fáil go hioml'n leis an bhfeachtas chUN go mbeadh an ghaeilge ina teanga oifigiœil san aontas eorpach.

Dar le Fianna Fáil ba cheart buanœ na gaeilge a bheith mar theanga phobail ina chrit'zir maidir le ple'nail fhisiciœil do cheantair ghaeltachta.

Ba cheart go mbeadh plean n'isicenta don r'zamscola'ocht agus don ghaelscola'ocht leagtha amach ag na heagrais chaoi, agus go gcuirf' I gcr'ch ž.

Go gcuirfear oifig nua st'it ar bUN - oifig ombudsman na gaeilge - chUN go mbeadh an ceart dlith'uil agus an deis laethœil ag pobal na gaeilge a gcuid gn-

a dhžanamh tr' ghaeilge leis an stžt, leis na hœdaržis žiticela agus le fondœireachta' poibl'. Džanfaidh an oifig monat-ireacht ar sholžthar seirbh's' tr' ghaeilge, I dtreo is go mbeidh polasa' cinnte dhžtheangachais I bhfeidhm I gcœrsa' poibl'.

Go gceapfa' struchtœr le fžachaint chuige go mbeidh polasa' cinnte džtheangachais ž chur I bhfeidhm mar dhualgas dlithiceil san earnžil phoibl', chUN go ndeimhneofa' solžthar sheirbh's' tr' ghaeilge.

Go bhžachfa' le comhphžirt'ocht n'os leithne a thabhairt I gcr'ch idir an earnžil phoibl', an earnžil phr'obhžideach, eagrais dheonacha pobail agus eagrais ghaeilge, chUN gnž na gaeilge a lžidriœ I bhforbhairt pobail go hžiticil.

Go ndžanfa' iniœchadh ar dheiseanna chUN rann-ga beaga stžit, a dhžanfadh gn- tr' ghaeilge, a dh'lžrœ go hžiteanna ina bhfuil pobal gaeilge.

Go gcuirf' coiste nžisicenta ar bUN lžithreach a thabharfaidh faoi scrœdœ iomlžn a dhžanamh ar mhodhanna mœinte na gaeilge sa ch-ras oideachais. Feabhas m-r a chur ar chumas cainte agus cumarsžide, a bheadh mar aidhm aige.

ChUN freastal a dhžanamh ar na riachtanais ar leith oideachais ag scoileanna gaeltachta agus ag scoileanna lžn-ghaeilge, bun-far lžrionad acmhainn' chUN comhordnœ a dhžanamh ar sholžthar cu' de thžacsanna, žiseanna, f'sežin, clžracha, seirbh's' žiticela agus taca'ochta do mhœinteor' agus difhoghlaimeoir' na gaeilge.

Go mbeadh forbairt ar an mžid cœrsa' sa ghaeilge agus tr' ghaeilge ag an tr'œ leibhžal chUN freastal ar riachtanais na maclžinn, agus chUN cabhrœ le leathnœ œsžid na gaeilge I raon iomlžn diimeachta' tr'œ leibhžil.

Go gcuirf' solžthar ržascntž de ranganna agus -cžid' chleachtadh gaeilge ar fžil go nžisicenta do dhaoine fžsta atž ag iarraidh a gcumas gaeilge a fheabhsœ.

Cuirfidh Fianna Fáil lžthair ghaeilge ar an idirl'on chUN scžal na gaeilge a chraobhscaoileadh ar fud an domhain.

Go gcinnteofar go mbeidh solžthar cinnte ghaeilge ar na stžisicœin neamhspležcha craolachžin agus go ndžanfar forbairt leanœnach ar an gcrœolachan tr' ghaeilge go m-r mh-r tr' fhorbairt a dhžanamh ar theilif's na gaeilge, raidi- na gaeltachta, agus raidi- na life.

Go mbeadh scar n'os m- airgid ž bhronnadh ag an gcomhairle eala'ona chUN deilžail go cothrom le heala'on na gaeilge - sž sin, le haon chœrsa' cultœrtha atž ž dhžanamh n- ž reachtžil tr' ghaeilge.

Î tharla go bhfuil an ghaeilge luaite go sonrath sa reachta'ocht maidir leis an gcrannchur nžisicenta, measann Fianna Fáil go mba ch-ir n'os m- air-gid a

dhíleadh ar chur chUN cinn na gaeilge.

Go ndánfar forbairt ar =darús na gaeltachta agus roinn na gaeltachta tr' fhreagracht a thabhairt d-ibh as feidhme ríimse m-r seirbhis' stíit sa ghaeltacht, ar bhonn chonartha díis'neachta' eile stíit.

Go mbainf' lín oesíd as acmhainneacht =darús na gaeltachta mar eagra forbartha ríigicénach in aon dábhl-idice oedarús agus feidhmeanna -n lír-ch-ras riarachín phoibl'.

Go ndánfar forbairt ar thionscail agus turas-ireacht chultúrtha sa ghaeltacht.

Beidh sí mar aidhm lír-thármach ag Fianna Fáil go mbeidh costais' leictreachais, telef-in agus m-rsheirbh's' eile, chomh h'seal sna ceantair ghaeltachta agus atí siad in íiteanna eile.

Go dtabharfa' cabhair bhreise tr' =darús na gaeltachta do thionsail bheaga ardteicneola'ochta ar mian leo lonnó I gceantair phobail gaeilge.

Go gcuirfear ar ceal na ciorraithe a rinne an rialtas seo ar scíimeanna roinn na gaeltachta sa ghaeltacht.

restoring the peace process

playing a more effective international role

modernising our defence forces

restoring the peace process

Fianna Fáil in government will

work to re-establish the peace process and make it irreversible

promote a universal commitment to democratic principles

deepen further our valuable links with all sides of the community in northern
Ireland

encourage measures to develop confidence and to build economic bridges to peace

building peace from a democratic consensus

Fianna Fáil will aim to inject new political momentum into an inclusive northern talks process, to ensure that the electoral mandate of all parties that have renounced violence for good is fully respected.

We will work towards a closer, more productive relationship with the British government. We will continue to use the Anglo-Irish Agreement as an instrument for promoting equality, parity of esteem and institutional reform, until a new, more comprehensive agreement takes its place.

We will deepen our relationship with both unionists and nationalists, using the channels we developed in 1993-94 and have sought to build on while in opposition.

Fianna Fáil's approach to a solution in Northern Ireland will remain firmly based on the agreements between the Irish and British governments enshrined in the Downing Street Declaration of 1993 and the Framework Document of 1995, together with the consensus between almost all parties reflected in the draft report of the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation. Key to this approach is a total commitment to democratic principles, a commitment which we will work to have accepted by all on this island.

As soon as peace is restored, Fianna Fáil will reassemble the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation.

Building confidence on all sides

Fianna Fáil will encourage confidence-building measures, to develop more trust between the communities in the north and between the north and south of Ireland. In doing this we will focus on cultural identity, human rights, economic development in areas of deprivation, and issues of equality and parity of esteem in Northern Ireland.

In conditions of peace, we will consider seeking, in co-operation with a new British government, an independent international commission to establish the truth in regard to some of the most controversial incidents of the Troubles, whether the perpetrators were governmental or paramilitary organisations.

We will pay special attention to the situation of politically motivated prisoners, whether republican or loyalist, recognising the importance of this as a key confidence-building measure.

Building economic bridges to peace

The peace process and economic prosperity are inextricably linked: a more prosperous and peaceful Ireland will facilitate the long-term resolution of political problems, while real political progress would galvanise the economies of both north and south.

With this in mind, Fianna Fáil will give special priority to raising the level of north-south economic co-operation, where it is to clear mutual advantage. Areas of key opportunity are tourism, culture, transport, energy, agriculture, marine and inland waterways. International support from the EU and others will be fully harnessed to develop new projects in the Dublin-Belfast economic corridor and along the border on both sides. We will encourage the IDA and the IDB to work together to attract inward investment towards employment black spots on both sides of the border. We are also prepared to extend equal treatment to suppliers from Northern Ireland in the linkage programmes for overseas companies established here, as well as in public sector tender invitations, provided reciprocal arrangements can be agreed with the Northern authorities.

Playing a more effective international role

Fianna Fáil in government will

pursue a policy of constructive military neutrality - participating actively in peacekeeping and humanitarian missions, while rejecting all involvement with nuclear-based alliances

work towards a fresh vision for an expanded Europe

mobilise the EU on the linked threats of drugs and international crime

work to modernise the United Nations

build up to a minimum of 0.45% of GNP in development aid over 5 years - more if economic progress allows

make human rights concerns a priority

focus Ireland's representation abroad more closely on supporting overall national objectives

a constructive neutrality

Fianna Fáil believe in the positive value of Ireland's honourable tradition of military neutrality. Within the framework of neutrality, Fianna Fáil are committed to making an active contribution to the development of collective security through international organisations such as the UN and the Organisation for Security Co-operation in Europe. We favour making Irish troops available to the EU on a case-by-case basis for peacekeeping and humanitarian missions.

Fianna Fáil are committed to nuclear disarmament. We will oppose any moves to edge Ireland closer to membership of an alliance still committed to the deployment and use of nuclear weapons. We oppose Irish participation in nato itself, in nato-led organisations such as partnership for peace, or in the western European union beyond observer status. Fianna Fáil in government will not participate in any co-operative security structure which has implications for Irish neutrality without first consulting the people through a referendum. In line with our policy of constructive neutrality, Fianna Fáil are opposed to any plans to set up within the structure of the EU any organisation (such as the western European armaments group) which aims to boost research and development into weaponry, facilitate the international arms industry, or place arms contracts. Instead, we will promote projects to develop non-military industry in areas of Europe threatened by unemployment due to the shrinking arms trade. We will also work to establish an independent nuclear inspectorate at EU level.

Mobilising Europe against drugs and international crime

Fianna Fáil brought Ireland into the European community. We believe that Ireland's future lies in enthusiastic membership of the European union. Fianna Fáil will strive to achieve a fresh vision of the European union as a political and economic community, rather than a military superpower or a federal superstate.

Fianna Fáil favour the phased enlargement of the EU, to enhance both the stability and prosperity of Europe. We will defend the present institutional balance within the EU, particularly the guarantee that each member state has a commissioner, as vital to Ireland's interests. Fianna Fáil uphold the principle of subsidiarity, which encourages issues to be dealt with at the most appropriate level - European, national, regional or local. We also believe the EU must move closer to its citizens, not least by ridding itself of bureaucratic jargon.

Fianna Fáil will encourage the development of a new and innovative common foreign and security policy, designed with the priority of tackling drug-trafficking and the growth in international crime. Drugs and international crime are a linked challenge that threaten all EU members - a challenge that requires more concerted and sustained European action than it has yet received.

In championing such action, Fianna Fáil will press for an enhanced role for Europol, based on better exchange of intelligence between national police forces; tighter control of the EU's external borders; more effective action against trans-national money laundering; and the pooling of knowledge and research on drugs. We will vigorously oppose any move at European level to legalise drugs.

Modernising the UN

Fianna Fáil are committed to enhancing Ireland's positive role in the United Nations, particularly through peacekeeping. Fianna Fáil also recognise that the UN urgently needs to be modernised if it is to remain relevant in a changing world. Fianna Fáil will propose:

n speeding up the UN's response capacity, particularly to humanitarian disasters, through early warning systems and more flexible peacekeeping and mediation tools,

n a radical overhaul of UN funding, including collection of arrears,

n developing closer relations between the UN and national parliaments,

n establishing a UN economic security council, and

n establishing a permanent international criminal court, with jurisdiction over war crimes, international human rights abuses, environmental crime, international terrorism and drugs.

A coherent approach to global issues

Fianna Fáil will pursue a foreign policy that coherently addresses the key global issues that reflect the values and concerns of Irish people.

Development aid. Fianna Fáil will aim to donate, as a minimum, 0.45% of gnp in official development assistance by 2002. This will bring Ireland well above the present average oecd donation. If economic growth over the next five years matches that of the last five, we may be able to do better - working towards the eventual target of 0.7% of gnp, which we unreservedly accept as a long-term commitment. Fianna Fáil believe Irish people are willing - and indeed anxious - to share our increasing prosperity with those who are less fortunate.

Human rights. Fianna Fáil will make the active and practical vindication of human rights in all its forms a priority in government. We will work to impose sanctions against those who breach international human rights conventions. We regard reform of the European court of human rights as an urgent priority, so as to copper-fasten the court's role and speed up its proceedings. At home, we will seek to incorporate the human rights convention into domestic law, in a way that does not in any way diminish constitutional rights. We will set up a interdepartmental standing committee on human rights, to keep human rights concerns to the forefront in all government departments.

Child welfare. Fianna Fáil will promote co-ordinated international action against child prostitution and exploitation of child labour. (We introduced bills on these issues while in opposition.)

developing countries' debt. Fianna Fáil will work to convene a world conference to secure a complete write-off of the debt obligations of the less developed countries.

Deadly weapons. Fianna Fáil will push for an outright, worldwide ban on all types of anti-personnel landmines (in line with the domestic bill we introduced

while in opposition).

Focusing Ireland's representation abroad

Fianna Fáil will refine the objectives of our diplomatic representatives, enhancing their role in supporting the nation's goals.

We believe, for instance, that the pursuit of Irish economic development ranks equally in status with traditional diplomatic work. We will foster better co-ordination between state agencies, the private sector and our representation abroad. We will expand the "Ireland house" concept, which brings together under one roof the overseas offices of different Irish organisations.

We will also enhance our relationship with Irish people living abroad: this will extend to pre-emigration advice and counselling, and closer liaison with emigrants and their representatives.

Modernising our defence forces

Fianna Fáil in government will

prepare a white paper on defence policy within one year

create and implement a 10-year strategic plan for the defence forces, replacing the short-term decision-making now in place

equip our forces adequately for an expanded role in international peacekeeping

redefine and enhance the role of the air corps, the naval service and the fca

rebuild damaged morale through genuine consultation and a policy of openness

needed: a clear sense of direction

serious problems have been building up in our defence forces, caused by a lack of long-term planning. These include:

n the average age of soldiers is too high, due in the main to a stop-go recruiting policy.

N there is an imbalance between spending on pay and other resources, with payroll accounting for 80%.

N there is not enough up-to-date equipment, especially for international peacekeeping missions.

N there is an inability to carry out sub-unit and unit collective training.

N soldiers on security duties are working extremely long hours.

N morale has been damaged by the absence of a clear direction for the future, and worsened by the lack of openness and proper consultation by the present government.

Our commitment is to a long-term approach

Fianna Fáil consider it essential that a defence policy is formulated to create strong, efficient and cost-effective defence forces with timely investment in capital, equipment and training.

Fianna Fáil, in our first year in government, will prepare a white paper on defence policy. This will set out a detailed strategic plan, with a comprehensive 10-year programme of reform covering the key areas of personnel, equipment and infrastructure. Elements of the plan will include:

n delegating all day-to-day administration from the department of defence to the branches of the defence forces themselves.

N continuous recruiting, to replace the disastrous stop-go policy. We will recruit 1,500 new personnel over the next four years.

N encouraging women to enter all branches of the defence forces, and funding the facilities necessary for their full participation.

Expanding the international role

the Irish people are immensely proud of our defence forces, and nowhere is this more emphatically the case than in the service of our peace-keeping troops in far-flung fields under the banner of the united nations. Service in the UN is also a crucial element in the training requirement and morale of the force.

But in some instances, due to lack of resources, Irish troops can provide only a token involvement.

Fianna Fáil will ensure that the necessary equipment is purchased, or if necessary leased, to enable our troops to take part in a wider range of peacekeeping missions, under the UN or EU auspices.

Fianna Fáil will ratify the convention for the safety of united nations troops and associated personnel.

A clearer role for key branches

as part of our strategic plan, we will redefine and enhance the role of individual branches of the defence forces.

N we will bring up the naval service to full strength, in line with its increasing responsibilities in protecting our marine resources, in drugs interdiction and in pollution control. We also recognise the need to acquire additional vessels.

N we will treat the air corps as a separate autonomous entity for the purpose of promotion, competition and career development, as the present structure gives rise to serious personnel difficulties and considerable dissatisfaction. We will review the present system of contracts, and make the retirement and retention system more flexible.

N we will give the fca an expanded role, reaching into the heart of all communities, as part of the nation's response to criminality and terrorism.

Rebuilding morale through openness and consultation

Fianna Fáil recognise that the morale of any armed forces is the most important factor in maintaining the highest standards of training and efficiency among all ranks. It is therefore necessary in time of change, that the government's plans are open and that the widest possible consultations take place with the representative organisations of the defence forces before decisions are taken.

This has not happened under the present government, who seem unaware of fundamental changes that are taking place in the defence forces.

The introduction of representative associations has broadened the outlook of military personnel. The former strictly authoritarian ambience has been replaced by a more critical questioning attitude, based nevertheless on unswerving loyalty to the constitution of the state. Personnel are demanding more regard to personal and career development, in line with their peers in civilian life. It is no longer satisfactory simply to impose authority as a substitute.

So, in preparing and implementing our strategic plan for the defence forces, Fianna Fáil will engage in the fullest possible meaningful consultation both with the heads and with the representatives of the defence forces, to produce the best possible outcome.