

European Globalisation Fund

Mr F McCann asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what discussions it will have with members of the European Task Force, on its visit to Northern Ireland in December, regarding the demonstration of flexibility in the application of the European Globalisation Fund in situations such as occurred in Limavady.

(AQO 1217/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister (Rt Hon I Paisley and Mr M McGuinness): We welcomed the visit by the Taskforce which followed on from the important work taken forward by both Junior Ministers when they visited Brussels on 22 November and the discussion between Junior Minister Paisley and Commissioner Hubner when they addressed the IBEC-CBI Joint Business Council in October. During the November visit the Junior Ministers were accompanied by a delegation of senior officials from a number of departments. The aim of the visit was to discuss priorities and develop ideas for increased participation in European opportunities and prepare the ground for the Taskforce visit.

The Taskforce's visit represented an unprecedented opportunity for Northern Ireland. We also want to assure those workers in Limavady that we are doing everything that we can to minimise hardship. We will be exploring with the European Commission how they can help the Executive create an innovative and competitive economy.

The closure of Seagate in Limavady results from structural changes in world trade patterns. Changes which have created a cost gap compared with the company's Asian competitors.

President Barroso proposed the European Globalisation Fund to help workers experiencing the negative consequences of globalisation. He intended it as a sign of solidarity from those benefiting from open trade to those who suddenly lose their jobs. The Fund was launched in January 2007 and provides one-off time-limited individual support to complement the actions of national governments.

The Executive wants to alleviate hardship as best we can and to help redundant workers find other jobs as quickly as possible. The Globalisation Fund can assist with job search provision, personalised retraining, promoting entrepreneurship, self-employment and special allowances.