



National University of Ireland, Galway

Higher Diploma in Applied Communications

News Writing & Reporting  
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Examiners: Mr John Cunningham  
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Duration: Three hours and 20minutes.

Instructions: Please answer all questions. Question 1 carries 100 marks; question 2 carries 30 marks; question 3 carries 70 marks.

## QUESTION 1 (100marks)

You are a reporter for a regional newspaper based in Monaghan. You have been assigned to cover the the official opening of the Stranooden Group Water Scheme, County Monaghan by Mr. Noel Dempsey, T.D., Minister for the Environment and Local Government. You are required to submit an eight to ten paragraph report (350 words approx.) on the event, incorporating elements of the Minister's speech — summarising its content, giving prominence to its most newsworthy aspect and using direct quotation where appropriate — for publication in the following day's edition of your newspaper.

**Speech by Mr. Noel Dempsey, T.D., Minister for the Environment and Local Government on the occasion of the official opening of the Stranooden Group Water Scheme County Monaghan Saturday, Feburary 21, 1998**

"When Patrick Kavanagh, County Monaghan's most famous man of words, wrote "O commemorate me where there is water", we know he wasn't referring to group water schemes. Yet Kavanagh's words give us a keen insight into the drudgery associated with what are regarded today as relatively simple farm tasks. The spraying of the potatoes for example, without access to modern machinery and a farmyard hose, was described by Kavanagh as -

*"Hard Work*

*Put on four barrels*

*Filled with a porringer tin"*

You would be hard pressed to find a tin porringer or a wooden water barrel in all of County Monaghan today. Indeed few farmers regret that such artefacts are only seen nowadays as props in craft shops and make believe traditional Irish pubs.

Many factors have helped to improve the rural economy and the lifestyles of farming families and rural dwellers generally. Rural electrification, better transport and communications infrastructure have all been of enormous benefit. Among the most significant advances must be the availability of a clean and plentiful supply of water on tap.

The concept of the meitheal has deep roots in Irish rural culture and tradition and those people whose vision led to the development of the group scheme tapped into - if you'll pardon the pun - that co-operative spirit. The rest as they say is history.

There can be no gainsaying the enormous contribution which the group scheme concept has played in transforming the quality of live for people in rural Ireland. The resounding success of this example of self-help finds visible expression here with this spanking new facility, a scheme which symbolises the distance that has been travelled since the system first took root. Perhaps it's a time for a collective pat on the back!

But that might smack of complacency. We are still faced with formidable challenges when it comes to the supply of clean water and maintaining water quality generally. Clean water is a precious resource. There's a welcome and growing awareness of the increasing pressure which economic development and intensive agriculture place on water resources. While our surface waters are of very high quality generally, we cannot lose sight of the fact that up to 18% of our lakes are showing varying signs of pollution when we are so dependent on lakewater as a source of drinking water.

With the help of the EU we have been able to make an effective response to these factors through significant increases in investment in water and sewerage services.

Earlier this month I announced details of a record investment of £185m for 1998 - up 13% on last year. This includes over £28 m targeted directly at improving the state of our rural water supply systems, particularly group water systems.

This significant level of resources must be used to best effect on improving the quality, reliability and efficiency of rural water supplies. It's a difficult task, one which must be founded on twin supports: firstly, it must be properly planned and, secondly, it must embody a true spirit of partnership and co-operation between the public and the private sectors.

What do I mean by a planned approach? Well, by just looking at the major problem of water quality and supply in rural areas, it's clear that here is something that will have to be tackled in a structured way. There are no magic wand solutions. It's going to take time. And it's going to require the best use of the increased resources being provided.

This means that each county must draw up a strategic rural water plan which will identify the key needs in relation to water services and prioritise investment under the different financial measures available. The plan will have to embrace public and group supplies and set down a strategy for delivering the most efficient and effective water supply possible. In that context, water conservation and environmental considerations will have to be taken into account.

This year, my Department will be engaging consultants to prepare a model Strategic Rural Water Plan which can then be adapted for use in each county. In the meantime, the task of collecting baseline data for the plans should be put in hand.

Although essential, these planning mechanisms are just one part of a twin track approach. The second essential element is partnership. Local authorities, group schemes and other rural interests must all work together in developing and implementing the rural water programme.

There are five main elements to my proposals to underpin this partnership approach.

## **1 National Rural Water Monitoring Committee**

Firstly, I've decided to set up a National Committee to monitor and advise on the development and implementation of policy in relation to the rural water programme. It will also advise on the development of the model Rural Water Strategic Plan. This committee will have representatives from the private group water scheme sector, the local authorities, rural organisations and my own Department, under the stewardship of an independent chairperson.

The Committee will report annually to me on the operation of the devolved programme. These reports will focus particularly on the level of service provided by each local authority in

administering group scheme capital grants. If, on the basis of these reports, I'm satisfied that the level of service falls below an acceptable standard in any county, I am prepared to assume responsibility for the administration of grants in that county for a period of time.

## **2 Arrangements at County Level**

In my view, consultation at county level concerning the implementation of the rural water programme is also vitally important.

Therefore, it is intended that special committees will be set up in most counties to advise on the development of the county strategic rural water plan and on the operation of the devolved programme locally. These committees will also be able to feed views upwards to the National Committee.

Due to the variation in the level of group scheme activity between counties, special committees may not be required in all cases. Alternative less formal consultation and representation arrangements will be put in place in those counties.

## **3 County Liaison Officers**

The third element of this partnership initiative focuses on the need to strengthen the consultative process and to facilitate the flow of information between the group sector and the local authority. To achieve this, each county council will appoint a County Liaison Officer to deal with day to day issues in the implementation of the devolved programme. In some counties this may well require a full time officer.

## **4 Meeting the training needs of the group scheme sector**

The maintenance of water quality is greatly dependent on the operational efficiency of our systems. Providing plant managers with the skills to operate their facilities at optimum efficiency is therefore vital.

The training needs of the group scheme sector is an area that has been neglected and is in need of urgent review. I've therefore asked the Water Services National Training Group, who currently provide training services for water personnel in local authorities, to undertake this review and to develop a modern training programme suited to the specific needs of the group scheme sector. To assist in this, I've arranged that a representative of the group scheme sector will be invited to sit on the national training committee.

## **5 Financial Support**

Finally, the four elements I've just described cannot hope to succeed without adequate financial support. If the group water sector is to play its part as invigorated partners in action, it must undertake an unprecedented developmental and educational programme. That's why I welcome the Federation's Business Development Plan which I recently received.

I've already told the Federation that I'm willing to commit a substantial contribution of public money towards the cost of a Developmental Programme. I hope to hold immediate discussions with the Federation on how we can advance this issue.

## **Conclusion**

The task of upgrading deficient group water schemes is enormous. It's a task which my own Department, the local authorities and the group scheme sector must approach in a planned way and in a spirit of partnership.

The measures I've outlined today are not designed to solve all the problems overnight. Nevertheless, they represent a significant first step on a long road which will, within a reasonable timeframe, result in a real and substantial improvement in the rural water supplies in this country. I hope that the Federation's representatives, including those who are here today, will take this message back to their AGM tomorrow. On the basis of the quite radical proposals for improvement I've outlined here today, I hope that they will encourage their members to accept what is, essentially, a partnership approach for the future.

## **Stranooden**

Finally, to return to the task on hand - the official opening of this magnificent new treatment works and headquarters for the Stranooden scheme. This is indeed a flagship community owned facility and a show case for the group scheme ideal.

I congratulate all associated with this project, particularly the hardworking group scheme committee, your chairman Mr. Joe Martin and Treatment System Ltd who designed and oversaw the construction of the plant.

I'm very impressed with the level of new technology employed and the extremely high standard of finish both inside and outside the plant. I wish you every success with your new scheme and I hope all your members enjoy many years of un-interrupted and high quality water supply.

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**Question 2 (30 marks)**

**Explain the purpose of quotations in news stories. What should they reveal? And why are they so important to the context of the story, both from the Reporter's perspective and from that of the reader?**

### Question 3 (70 marks)

**The following is an extract from the notebook of a journalist called to the scene of a major crime. Write a 400 word story based on the facts in this notes extract. Through the story you should refer to the events as 'yesterday.'**

Went to Salthill Park where body of woman was found. Press conference by Assistant Garda Commissioner Mr. Bill Whelan where details of case were outlined.

Woman (27) found dead in the Salthill Park (near bandstand) this morning by park keeper Mr. James Conyngham. Mr. Conyngham had begun work just after 8.30a.m. and was moving towards one of flower beds in the area on which working the previous day, when saw body of woman inside railings of bandstand.

Asst. Commissioner Whelan: Body was that of local woman, Mrs. Rosaleen Long .... had been in Salthill at dancing club on Monday night. Club gives dancing lessons to members. Mrs. Long last seen leaving club at 11.30p.m. when she left to get bus on Salthill Promenade. Told other members that she would be all right ... always went home on 11.40p.m. bus which went directly across city to her home at 20 Renmore Villas, Renmore, Galway.

Mrs. Long was regular attender at dancing club. Mother of three .... James (14), Mary (11) and Johnnie (6). Married to fitter Thomas Long (35), a native of Tuam, Co. Galway, and family have lived in Renmore in three-bedroom semi-detached house at Renmore Villas.

Family deeply shocked .... children being cared for by relatives (mother-in-law Kathleen Long) lives nearby. Husband Thomas admitted to University College Hospital Galway shortly after told of his wife's murder. Has been admitted to Coronary Care Unit of UCHG because of suspected heart attack when told of wife's murder. Doctors (according to Asst. Commissioner Whelan), say is 'comfortable' and is not in any danger following minor heart attack. Has been previously treated as heart patient at hospital and is on waiting-list for treatment for angina.

Gardai say murdered woman was dead for a number of hours and put time of death at about 12.30a.m. Screams were heard in neighbourhood, according to Asst.

Commissioner Whelan, but there had been festival in Salthill that night and screams were dismissed as coming from a beach party at nearby bathing place on Salthill Strand.

Gardai awaiting the results of final post mortem but believe that woman was strangled and had been sexually assaulted.

Special appeal has been made to public for help because of the nature of crime which Gardai say may be linked to an attempted attack on a woman at bus shelter in Salthill three nights previously, when intended victim (21 years old student) fought off her attacker.