

Written Answers.

The following are questions tabled by Members for written response and the ministerial replies as received on the day from the Departments [unrevised].

Questions Nos. 1 to 9, inclusive, answered orally.

EU Battlegroups

10. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Defence if he will provide an update on Ireland's participation in the Austro-German Battlegroup; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48476/12]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): Ireland is currently participating in the Austro-German led Battlegroup, which will be on stand-by until 31 December 2012. In 2010, the then Government approved Ireland's participation in this Battlegroup. The other members of the Austro-German Battlegroup are Austria, Germany, Czech Republic, Croatia and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM). Our contribution is a Reconnaissance Company together with staff posts at both the Operational and Force Headquarters. Should the Battlegroup be deployed, Ireland's contribution would amount to approximately 175 personnel. During the stand-by period one officer has been deployed to the Battlegroup Headquarters in Ulm, Germany. This officer is engaged in training and planning activities.

Under the Battlegroup Concept, Battlegroups are designed to be operational within 5-10 days of approval of an operation by the Council of the European Union. Battlegroup operations must be sustainable for at least 30 days which can be extended to a maximum of 120 days.

Training of the manoeuvre elements of the Austro-German Battlegroup took place in the contributing Member States - Irish troops were trained in Ireland. There were no joint field exercises or manoeuvre training with other elements in the Austro-German Battlegroup.

Any decision to deploy the Austro-German Battlegroup will continue to be taken by unanimity by the Council of the European Union. In addition, any decision by Ireland to participate in a specific Battlegroup operation is subject to our national sovereign decision-making procedures - "Triple Lock", i.e. UN mandate, Government and Dáil approval. At this time, there are no proposals under consideration for the deployment of the Austro/German Battlegroup.

White Paper on Defence

11. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Defence his plans for a new White Paper on Defence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48487/12]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): The White Paper on Defence has provided

the policy framework and development strategy for Defence since 2000. The planning certainty arising from the policy provisions of the current White Paper underpinned the modernisation process within the Defence Organisation. It also afforded the requisite flexibility to develop appropriate capabilities in response to changes in the defence and security environment. Having considered the preliminary work undertaken on the preparation of a new White Paper on Defence, I decided to expand the planned consultative process by initiating the preparation of a Green Paper on Defence. In April 2012, a Memorandum for Government setting out the proposed approach and timeframe was approved by Government. The purpose of the Green Paper will be to elicit an informed debate regarding Ireland's defence policy.

The process of preparing a Green Paper on Defence has commenced. Following Government approval for the process for the development of a new Green/White Paper on Defence, an interdepartmental group was convened to prepare a current assessment of the defence and security environment. The assessment will form the basis of the policy questions to be raised in the Green Paper.

The Green Paper is expected to be published at the end of 2012. When published, the Green Paper will initiate and inform a broad consultative process as part of the development of a new White Paper on Defence. The views of members of the public and other interested parties on Defence policy and Defence provision will be welcomed.

The new White Paper on Defence is scheduled for completion at the end of 2013 and will address Defence Policy and inform long term capability requirements.

Overseas Missions

12. **Deputy Seán Ó Feargháil** asked the Minister for Defence if he expects the Defence Forces to undertake any new United Nations missions in 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48470/12]

32. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Defence the number of countries across the world in which members of the Defence Forces are serving; and the requests he may be considering in other countries and new missions. [48466/12]

168. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Defence the total number of military personnel serving overseas on various missions UN or otherwise in each of the past four years to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49032/12]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): I propose to take Questions Nos. 12, 32 and 168 together.

Ireland has offered, through the United Nations Stand-by Arrangements System (UNSAS), to provide up to 850 military personnel for overseas service at any one time. This demonstrates Ireland's commitment to the cause of international peace. This is the maximum sustainable commitment that Ireland can make to overseas peacekeeping operations. with smaller contributions in Kosovo, Bosnia Herzegovina, Afghanistan and EUTM Somalia.

Ireland is also currently participating in the Austro-German led Battlegroup which is on stand-by from 1 July 2012 to 31 December 2012. Defence Forces personnel are currently serving in peacekeeping operations in 11 countries throughout the world.

The average monthly figures for Defence Forces personnel involved in UN-led and UN mandated missions for the years 2008 -2011 breaks down as follows:

Year	Average Number
2008	660 personnel
2009	744 personnel
2010	412 personnel
2011	337 personnel

The average monthly figure so far for 2012 is 477 personnel. This does not include the 175 personnel currently assigned to the EU Battlegroup.

As regards future deployment of Defence Forces overseas, Ireland receives requests, from time to time, in relation to participation in various missions and these are considered on a case-by-case basis. When considering any particular request, the existence of realistic objectives and a clear mandate, which has the potential to contribute to a political solution, consideration of how the mission relates to the priorities of Irish foreign policy and the degree of risk involved are amongst the factors considered.

Ireland has received an invitation from the Operational Commander of Operation EUNAVFOR ATALANTA to contribute an Autonomous Vessel Protection Detachment (AVPD) to the Operation. This operation is the EU's first maritime operation which contributes to improving maritime security off the coast of Somalia and in the Indian Ocean. The Defence organisation is currently considering whether it will be in a position to contribute an AVPD to this operation.

The Department of Defence constantly reviews the deployment of Defence Forces personnel overseas. However, following the deployment of a Battalion to UNIFIL since mid-2011, it is not anticipated that there will be any major deployments of troops to further missions in the foreseeable future. However, the potential for deploying smaller groups of personnel and military observers in support of UN mandated operations will continue to be examined positively, as such requests arise.

Defence Forces Ombudsman

13. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Defence if he is satisfied that his decision to change the role of the Defence Forces Ombudsman from full time to part time is adequate for the duties entailed in the role. [48464/12]

31. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Defence if he will report on the recent decision to downgrade the post of Defence Forces Ombudsman from a full-time to a part-time post; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48456/12]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): I propose to take Questions Nos. 13 and 31 together.

The primary role of the Ombudsman for the Defence Forces, which is provided for in the Ombudsman (Defence Forces) Act 2004, is to provide an independent appeals process for members of the Defence Forces. Such appeals arise where a complaint has been processed through the internal Defence Forces "Redress of Wrongs" process but the member remains dissatisfied with the outcome or the manner in which the complaint was handled.

The 2004 Act also provides that, subject to certain conditions, the Ombudsman may accept complaints directly from former members of the Defence Forces.

The office of the Ombudsman is now well established and a number of administrative and systemic issues identified by the outgoing Ombudsman have been addressed. This has contributed to improvements in procedures and policies within the Defence Forces.

Recent trends show a significant increase in the number of redress of wrongs complaints being resolved within the military system, thus reducing the number of cases being referred to the Ombudsman for investigation, a fact I very much welcome. In addition, it is anticipated that the new and comprehensive promotion system for NCOs agreed and introduced earlier this year will eliminate the many complaint referrals to the Ombudsman relating to promotion. Such referrals currently account for about a third of the caseload in the Ombudsman's office. Against this background, the post of Ombudsman for the Defence Forces is being filled on a part time, three day week basis, subject to ongoing review of caseload and referrals.

I can now inform the House that yesterday the Government decided, on foot of a recommendation from me, that it would advise the President to appoint Mr. Patrick Anthony McCourt as Ombudsman for the Defence Forces for a period of three years. The Warrant appointing Mr. McCourt to the post is currently with the President for signature. Mr. McCourt was recommended for the post by the Public Appointments Service following an open competition.

There are no plans currently for changes in the role of the Ombudsman or to amend the legislation in relation to the powers or functions of the Ombudsman.

Question No. 14 answered with Question No. 6.

Defence Forces Expenditure

15. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Defence the cost-cutting measures adopted by his Department in respect of each of the Defence Forces in each of the past three years to date; the net benefit in terms of actual savings in respect of each cost-cutting measure; the actual loss in terms of capability arising from such measures; the way this compares with previous cost-cutting in the Defence Forces; if he is satisfied that cost-cutting measures to date do not have a fundamental negative impact on the capability of the Army, Navy and Air Corps; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48506/12]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): The depth and gravity of the current economic difficulties means that all areas of the public sector must deliver greater efficiencies and operate within a reduced resource envelope. All elements of Defence expenditure have been critically reviewed in order to deliver the required savings. Some of the measures to reduce costs in the past three years have included reductions in the number of military and civilian personnel, the further rationalisation and consolidation of the Defence property portfolio and reductions in paid training for members of the Reserve.

Equipment procurement has been curtailed in line with priority operational requirements and the Defence Organisation is fully participating in central initiatives to deliver further efficiencies such as procurement reform and shared services initiatives.

Arising from the Comprehensive Review of Expenditure in 2011, the Government decided to stabilise the strength of the Permanent Defence Force at 9,500 personnel. A major reorganisation of the Permanent Defence Force is ongoing and this will ensure that within the reduced strength, the operational effectiveness of the Permanent Defence Force is maintained. This is being achieved through the rationalising of headquarters, administrative and support functions and re-balancing force elements in favour of "front line" operational Units.

The Defence Organisation is a leader in public sector reform and has acquired experience and a proven track record for successful reform and ongoing modernisation. The required savings of recent years, in both pay and non-pay, have necessitated a flexible and adaptive approach from the Defence Organisation. A key focus has been the prioritisation and maintenance of Permanent Defence Force operational capacity in order to ensure that the Permanent Defence Force retain the capacity to fulfil all roles assigned.

In total, these measures have facilitated a reduction in the Gross Provision for the Defence Vote (36) from €756m in 2010 to €727m in 2011 and €688m in 2012.

I am satisfied that the Permanent Defence Force will remain a well trained and well equipped military organisation which is capable of meeting the roles laid down by Government both at home and abroad.

Defence Forces Strength

16. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Defence if he continues to be satisfied regarding the adequacy in terms of equipment, personnel and training of the Defence Forces to adequately respond to any emergency or security issues that might arise in the future including natural disasters; if the capabilities of the Defences Forces are regularly or intermittently assessed regarding their ability to meet such requirements; if the chain of command in respect of either type of emergency is adequately structured to provide a rapid response; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48505/12]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): The involvement of the Defence Forces in responding to emergencies or security issues arises from requests for assistance from An Garda Síochána (as aid to the civil power) or from other agencies of the State (as aid to civil authority). In relation to security, primary responsibility for the maintenance of law and order rests with An Garda Síochána. However, one of the roles assigned to the Defence Forces in the White Paper on Defence (2000) is to provide Aid to the Civil Power (ATCP) which, in practice, means to assist An Garda Síochána when requested to do so. A wide variety of military training activities are specifically designed to counter or respond to possible security emergencies and the Defence Forces hold regular coordination and liaison meetings with An Garda Síochána in relation to ATCP issues.

The full spectrum of Defence Forces personnel and equipment, commensurate with operational requirements, is available for deployments in response to emergencies and crises. The Defence Forces alert system is based on a graduated response, which ensures that the required level of readiness and commitment by the Defence Forces can be readily achieved. As a support agency the Defence Forces deploy capabilities that are integral to their military and contingency roles and training is in relation to these capabilities rather than specific capabilities for natural disasters or possible terrorist attacks.

The Framework for Major Emergency Management sets out the structure enabling the Principal Response Agencies (An Garda Síochána, the Health Service Executive and Local Authorities) to prepare for, and make a coordinated response to, major emergencies and the Defence Forces respond within that framework. The Major Emergency Framework sets out the specific arrangements for coordination and cooperation between the Principal Response Agencies and the Defence Forces. Representation on the Government Task Force on Emergency Planning, by both my Department and the Defence Forces, ensures the fullest coordination and cooperation in the event of an emergency. The Operations Directorate in Defence Forces Headquarters manages the necessary cross-service coordination in responding to both emergency and secu-

rity issues. These arrangements have proved effective in all emergencies encountered to date.

Defence Forces Reorganisation

17. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Defence the strategic rationale for relocating Defence Forces personnel from McKee Barracks to Cathal Brugha Barracks. [48462/12]

23. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Defence the way the proposals for the reorganisation of the Defence Forces as applied to Dublin have improved their capacity to discharge their responsibilities to our capital city and the strategic hub of the State. [48463/12]

25. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Defence if he will postpone his plans for the restructuring of the Defence Forces until the White Paper on Defence is published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48453/12]

35. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Defence his plans for the restructuring of the Defence Forces organisation, including plans to abolish the 4th Western Brigade; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48452/12]

164. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Defence the basis for the reorganisation of the Defence Forces such as closure of military barracks, brigade reduction or other similar measures of such policy is deemed to be in line with international trends or for other reasons; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49028/12]

165. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Defence if he will set out his preferred option for the future development of the Defence Forces; if this is in line with the strategy of senior military authorities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49029/12]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): I propose to take Questions Nos. 17, 23, 25, 35, 164 and 165 together.

The current reorganisation of the Defence Forces was in response to the Government decision to stabilise the strength of the Permanent Defence Force at 9,500 personnel. At this revised strength ceiling, the existing organisational structures that had been in place for a strength ceiling of 11,500 personnel were no longer viable. Accordingly I initiated a major reorganisation of the Permanent Defence Force. The purpose of the reorganisation is to ensure that within the reduced strength, the operational effectiveness of the Permanent Defence Force is prioritised.

In July of this year, the Chief of Staff and Secretary General submitted agreed reorganisation proposals for my consideration, which I accepted. These proposals had due regard to Defence Forces operational requirements and the Chief of Staff confirmed that the proposals would ensure that the Permanent Defence Force could continue to meet all operational requirements within a strength ceiling of 9,500 personnel.

The recommendations outlined a Permanent Defence Force Army structure based on two Brigades with the brigade headquarters located in Cork and Dublin. Other key aspects of this reorganisation included the consolidation of under-strength Units and the disestablishment of certain units, a reduction in the number of headquarters and a re-deployment of personnel from administrative and support functions to operational Units. As part of this process, the number of Army infantry battalions will reduce from nine under-strength infantry battalions to seven full strength infantry battalions. In Dublin two under-strength infantry battalions are being consolidated into one full strength battalion.

A fundamental and major organisational change such as this one required a holistic approach rather than focusing on local issues and concerns. The proposed future location of Headquarters and Units were contained in the recommendations I received from the Chief of Staff and the Secretary General having regard to Defence Forces capability and operational requirements. I accepted these recommendations in full.

The implementation of the reorganisation is underway and all personnel in the Permanent Defence Force have now been briefed on the reorganisation proposals. They will receive further briefings and advice on the many options available to them as implementation of the reorganisation progresses.

The Green and White Paper process is scheduled for completion by the end of 2013. In the context of the immediate financial realities and in order to maintain the operational capabilities of the Permanent Defence Force to the greatest extent possible, it was neither prudent nor practical to delay a reorganisation of the Defence Forces until 2014.

I am firmly committed to maintaining the capacity of the Permanent Defence Force to meet their operational requirements. The current reorganisation is an essential part of that process.

European Council Meetings

18. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Defence when he will next attend an EU meeting with his counterparts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48489/12]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): During each European Union Presidency both formal and informal meetings of Defence Ministers are held. There is no separate Defence Ministers' Council within the EU Council of Ministers. However, twice a year - once during each Presidency - Defence Ministers attend the formal Foreign Affairs Council. These Council meetings are held in Brussels or Luxembourg at the invitation of the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Baroness Catherine Ashton. I will attend the next meeting of the Foreign Affairs Council with Ministers of Defence in Brussels on Monday 19 November 2012. The Agenda for the meeting includes an Orientation debate on Defence Policy in view of discussions at the European Council in December 2013, a presentation and discussion on the Defence Task Force which is responsible for coordinating Defence issues within the Commission and in cooperation with the European External Action Service and the European Defence Agency, as well as a discussion on the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy military operations. As part of Ireland's Presidency of the Council of the European Union during the first half of 2013, I will host an Informal Meeting of Defence Ministers in Dublin Castle on 12-13 February 2013.

Defence Forces Reserve Funding

19. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Defence the financial supports that will be available to members of the Reserve Defence Forces into the future. [48458/12]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): I am not in a position at the present time to outline what financial supports will be available to members of the Reserve into the future. You will appreciate that although the Value for Money Review of the Reserve Defence Force has been submitted to me, the responses to the recommendations contained in that report are currently being developed. Until this process has been finalised, it would be inappropriate for me to comment on financial or other matters relating to the future of the Reserve at this time.

Question No. 20 answered with Question No. 6.

Defence Forces Allowances

21. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Defence his views on whether most of the allowances paid to Defence Forces personnel form part of core pay, and will be protected in the event of any review of such allowances. [48562/12]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): As the Deputy is aware the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform has already undertaken a review of allowances and premium payments across the public sector and proposals were brought to Government for decision. Further to this, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform published the results of this review of allowances and the outcome of the Government decision on its website at www.per.gov.ie. In the interests of bringing forward these savings to the paybill, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform wrote to my Department instructing management to immediately engage with staff interests with a view to securing their early agreement to the elimination of certain Defence Forces allowances.

While Military Service Allowance and some other allowances may be considered to be part of core pay it is important to understand that the term “Allowances” in the Defence sector covers a variety of payment types that are very different from each other. Some are intended to reimburse expenses and do not actually form part of remuneration. Some payments are made in recognition of particular technical or professional qualifications while other allowances recognise particularly onerous duties whether at home or overseas that fall outside the norms taken into account in setting basic pay while also reflecting the fact that the Defence Forces do not receive overtime.

It is also important to recognise that almost two thirds of the payments on allowances is accounted for by the top three categories of allowance, that is, Technician Pay, Security Duty Allowances, and Overseas Peace Support Allowances. The Technical Pay and Security Duty Allowance had previously been selected for review as part of the Defence Sectoral Croke Park Agreement and are currently being addressed with the Representative Associations in accordance with agreed procedures under the Conciliation and Arbitration Scheme for the Defence Forces. The Deputy will appreciate that as discussions under this Scheme are confidential to the parties involved it would not be appropriate for me to comment further on this issue at this juncture.

Overseas Missions

22. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Defence the timeframe he proposes to keep seven members of the Defence Forces in Afghanistan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48503/12]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): The Defence Forces are primarily deployed on overseas missions in support of international peace and security under UN mandates. On 20 December 2001, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 1386 under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, authorising the establishment of an International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan. There are fourteen UN Security Council Resolutions relating to ISAF, most recently UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2069 (2012), adopted on 9 October 2012. This latest UN Security Council Resolution extended ISAF’s mandate for a further year until October 2013.

Ireland has participated in the NATO-led UN mandated mission since 5 July 2002, following the Government Decision of 2 July 2002, authorising the provision of seven members of the Permanent Defence Force for service with the force.

The continued participation by seven members of the Permanent Defence Force in ISAF is reviewed annually by the Government. The most recent decision by the Government was on 26 June 2012, when it agreed to continue to provide seven members of the Permanent Defence Force for service with ISAF for a further period from July 2012, subject to ongoing review by the Minister for Defence. The seven Defence Forces personnel work in staff appointments in planning and administrative roles based in ISAF headquarters in Kabul. Planning for the draw-down of ISAF generally is currently ongoing and the withdrawal of the Defence Forces personnel from the mission will be coordinated within the context of the overall ISAF drawdown plan.

Question No. 23 answered with Question No. 17.

Drugs Smuggling

24. **Deputy Derek Keating** asked the Minister for Defence are the Defence Forces aid to civil powers activity in relation to the monitoring of and the arresting of those who are importing illicit drugs to the State; if he is satisfied that the Defence Forces, by way of the Irish Navy, the Air Corps and Defence Force patrols, are adequately equipped to assist the Gardaí in dealing with this activity; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48455/12]

26. **Deputy Derek Keating** asked the Minister for Defence are the Defence Forces aid to civil powers activity in relation to the monitoring of and the arresting of those who are importing illicit drugs to the State; if he is satisfied that the Defence Forces, by way of the Irish Navy, the Air Corps and Defence Force Patrols, are adequately equipped to assist the Gardaí in dealing with this activity; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48454/12]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): I propose to take Questions Nos. 24 and 26 together.

The Customs Service of the Revenue Commissioners has primary responsibility for the prevention of drug smuggling into the country and responsibility for the prevention of crime rests primarily with An Garda Síochána. However, the White Paper on Defence (2000) provides for a security role for the Naval Service and the Air Corps to support the civil authorities in this area and assistance in the prevention of drug smuggling is recognised as a very important part of their duties.

Government measures to improve law enforcement in relation to drugs, including the establishment in 1993 of a Joint Task Force involving An Garda Síochána, the Customs Service and the Naval Service, have helped to maximise the effective use of Naval Service resources in combating drug trafficking. The Naval Service, as a member of the Joint Task Force, is also committed to an international initiative, the Maritime Analysis and Operations Centre – Narcotics, (MAOC-N). The Centre which was established in 2007 has led to a greater focus on intelligence exchange amongst countries to tackle large drug shipments by sea. MAOC-N was set up by seven European countries and is designed as an international co-ordination force with access to national tasking agencies and requires participation and resources from all active members. An Garda Síochána and the Customs Service have full-time officers based at its Centre in Lisbon. Irish Naval Service personnel travel to the Centre when requested by the Joint Task Force.

The Naval Service operates eight general purpose patrol ships, which are tasked with coastal and offshore patrolling and surveillance for the State. The Naval Service is committed to hav-

ing at least three vessels on patrol within the Irish Exclusive Economic Zone at any one time. All vessels are multi-tasked in the sense that they also undertake general surveillance, security and other duties while on patrol. As the need arises, Naval Service vessels are deployed on drug interdiction operations. A contract was placed in 2010 for the provision of two new Offshore Patrol Vessels (OPVs) for the Naval Service. The acquisition of these new vessels will ensure that the Naval Service can continue to carry out its drug interdiction role in support of the Joint Task Force as well as its other taskings. The first vessel is scheduled for delivery in early 2014. The second new vessel will follow one year later.

The Air Corps are also involved in efforts to prevent drug trafficking. The Air Corps Maritime Squadron carries out aerial surveillance within the Irish Exclusive Economic Zone using the two CASA maritime patrol aircraft. These CASA aircraft have an important surveillance capability which offers aerial assistance to the Naval Service in patrolling our Irish Exclusive Economic Zone. Both CASA aircraft underwent mid-life upgrades, which were completed in 2008. The upgrades included the fitting of state-of-the-art surveillance and communication equipment. The Air Corps has also, on occasion, carried members of the Customs National Drugs Team in an observational capacity for the purposes of monitoring vessels suspected of smuggling drugs. I am satisfied that both the Air Corps and Naval Service have the necessary resources to meet all their operational requirements including the support of the civil authorities in the prevention of drug smuggling into this country.

Question No. 25 answered with Question No. 17.

Question No. 26 answered with Question No. 24.

Military Archives

27. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Defence if there is a timescale for the release of the military pension records. [48561/12]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): The Military Service Pensions Archive project is a cornerstone of the Government Centenary Programme. Approximately 300,000 files relating to the period from Easter Week, 1916, through the War of Independence and Civil War comprise this collection. The files relate mainly to applications by individuals and/or their dependants for the award of pension and gratuities for veterans who served as members of the Irish Volunteers, the Irish Citizen Army, the Irish Republican Army, Cumann na mBan, the National Army/Defence Forces on active service or who were casualties or wounded while on duty during the period from April and May 1916 through to 30 September 1923. A phased release of material into the public domain is planned. The first release, primarily web-based and concentrated on 1916 participants, is planned for early 2013. Regular releases relating to the War of Independence and Civil War will occur in the run up to 2016.

Subsequent releases will have a web element but it is important to note that not all papers on each file will be available online. Physical visits to the Military Archives will be required to see the full material. It is envisaged that the provision of accommodation for people wishing to access the Military Archives records and for the storage of the archives will be progressed further under the Governments Centenary Programme.

Defence Forces Deployment

28. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Defence if he will provide details in tabular form of all occasions on which Defence Forces personnel were deployed for civilian events from March 2011 to date in 2012; the cost of each deployment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48468/12]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): The Defence Forces receive an extensive number of requests each year from individuals, organisations and from Government Departments and Agencies to deploy personnel to civilian events. These events range from a local charity organisation, where a handful of personnel might provide a Military display, to a national event such as the annual National Day of Commemoration where the Defence Forces have a key ceremonial role. Given the number and scale of these requests, it would not be feasible to capture the details sought in respect of every occasion where Defence Forces personnel were deployed for civilian events. I have however detailed the personnel numbers involved in some of the higher profile events in the tabular statement below.

Details in relation to the costs of these deployments are not recorded as no significant personnel costs arise as a result of the Defence forces' participation in these events. The only costs that may arise are in relation to subsistence and transport/fuel costs. These are not captured for every individual event but should the Deputy identify a particular event(s) that is of interest to him, I will request my Department to calculate the costs that may have been incurred and I will write to the Deputy directly.

Event	2011	2012
1916 Easter Sunday Ceremony	409	409
The National Day of Commemoration	357	340
Annual Famine Commemoration	164	119

Defence Forces Deployment

29. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Defence the measures he will undertake to ensure that rural Reserve Defence Forces outposts are maintained and fully supported by permanent members of the Defence Forces. [48459/12]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): Arising from the Comprehensive Review of Expenditure (CRE), the Government stabilised the strength ceiling of the PDF at 9,500 personnel. A major re-organisation of the PDF was initiated which will entail a reduction in the number of Army Brigades from three to two. As part of this re-organisation the number of PDF personnel (known as PDF Cadre) available to work full-time with the Army Reserve is being reduced to 24 in each Brigade (48 in total). Additional support will be provided to the Army Reserve from PDF Units as part of their ongoing duties.

In light of the reduction in the number of full-time PDF Cadre, it is clearly not feasible to staff all posts in the same way as they are currently staffed and alternative approaches must be developed. I understand that the Steering Committee that undertook the VFM Review had due regard to the revised PDF structures and resource constraints when framing their recommendations.

As the proposed responses to these recommendations are currently being developed, it would be inappropriate to comment further at this point.

EU Battlegroups

30. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Defence the cost of the Irish Army participation in the EU Battle Groups; the cost allocated for training and participation if they are actually dispatched to take part in a war; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44912/12]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): Ireland is currently participating in the Austro-German led Battlegroup, which will be on stand-by until 31 December 2012. In 2010, the then Government approved Ireland's participation in this Battlegroup. The other members of the Austro-German Battlegroup are Austria, Germany, Czech Republic, Croatia and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM). Our contribution is a Reconnaissance Company together with staff posts at both the Operational and Force Headquarters amounting to approximately 175 personnel. During the stand-by period one officer has been deployed to the Battlegroup Headquarters in Ulm, Germany. This officer is engaged in training and planning activities. Ireland has previously participated in the Nordic Battlegroup in 2008 and 2011. The other members of the Nordic Battlegroup were Sweden, acting as Framework Nation, Finland, Norway, Estonia and Croatia (2011 only).

Any decision by Ireland to participate in a specific Battlegroup operation is subject to our national sovereign decision-making procedures - "Triple Lock", i.e. UN mandate, Government and Dáil approval. The participation by the Defence Forces in EU Battlegroups increases its interoperability with forces from other Member States. The costs of equipment and additional training are marginal. The capabilities and the requisite high-end equipment in respect of Ireland's contributions to the Battlegroups already reside within the Defence Forces. No military equipment has been purchased specifically for EU Battlegroups. Training of the manoeuvre elements of the Austro-German Battlegroup took place in the contributing Member States - Irish troops were trained in Ireland. Unlike the Nordic Battlegroup, there were no joint field exercises or manoeuvre training with other elements in the Austro-German Battlegroup. Battlegroup training in Ireland is part and parcel of the overall programme of training for rapid deployment elements of the Defence Forces for overseas operations and, in the case of the current Battlegroup, comprises mainly the standard training of reconnaissance formations.

Under the Battlegroup Concept, Battlegroups are designed to be operational within 5-10 days of approval from the Council of the European Union and must be sustainable for at least 30 days which could be extended to 120 days, if resupplied. Based on previous deployments, the current estimated additional cost for a maximum 120 day Battlegroup deployment would be €10.7 million (excluding allowances and ammunition which are generally already provided for in the Defence Vote). This cost will only arise if the Battlegroup is actually deployed. There are no proposals under consideration at this time for the deployment of the Austro/German Battlegroup.

Question No. 31 answered with Question No. 13.

Question No. 32 answered with Question No. 12.

Overseas Missions

33. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Defence the number of Irish Defence Forces personnel currently serving in Syria; the role of Irish Defence Forces personnel in this location; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48467/12]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): Five (5) members of the Permanent Defence Force are deployed in Syria as part of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organisation (UNTSO). The Defence Forces have participated in UNTSO since 1958. Defence Forces personnel serving with this mission are based in Syria, Israel and Lebanon. The 5 Defence Forces personnel based in Syria are part of Observer Group Golan (OGG) responsible for the Syrian side of the Golan Heights. Their duties include manning Observation Posts, conducting fortnightly inspections in the area; conducting patrols in the area (3 per fortnight) and conducting other tasks as required.

As the security situation in Syria remains highly unstable and volatile, Defence Forces personnel normally based in Damascus were relocated by the United Nations from Damascus to United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) accommodation on the Golan Heights, on 15 October 2012, as a temporary force protection measure. The Irish personnel continue to fulfil their roles from their current location. It is intended that they will return to accommodation in Damascus when the security situation allows it. It is not yet clear when that might be.

UNTSO works closely with the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and UNDOF. The main objectives of UNTSO are to monitor ceasefires, to supervise armistice agreements and to assist the UN peacekeeping operation in the area. It also maintains a presence in the Egypt-Israel sector in the Sinai. UNTSO maintains offices in Beirut and Damascus.

Six members of the Permanent Defence Force who had been deployed as unarmed military observers to the United Nations Supervision Mission in Syria (UNSMIS) were withdrawn in August 2012 when the missions mandate came to an end.

Question No. 34 answered with Question No. 9.

Question No. 35 answered with Question No. 17.

International Relations

36. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will support the developing peace process in Colombia; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48862/12]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): The start last month in Norway of peace negotiations between the Government of Colombia and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) is a positive development that I warmly welcome. The next round of the negotiations will take place in Cuba. This peace process represents an important opportunity to bring an end to the long conflict that has caused much suffering in Colombia and to provide the people of that country with the peace and stability that they deserve. We in Ireland understand very well the challenges, the opportunities and the imperative of peace building. We appreciate the responsibility that rests on the parties to these negotiations and wish them success in their important work. We also support the Governments of Cuba and Norway that are, on the request of both parties, acting as facilitators to this process. If invited, we are ready within available means to assist the parties to the talks and the facilitators, particularly as regards advice on the lessons learned from our own peace process.

International Relations

37. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the reason that he is not actively supporting a peace process in Syria in view of the fact that it appears that Ireland is siding with one side of the conflict; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48863/12]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): Ever since the Syria crisis erupted 20 months ago at the beginning of a violent conflict that has so far claimed the lives of more than 20,000 people, Ireland has called consistently for an immediate end to the violence from all sides as a prelude to a necessary dialogue among all Syrians that should pave the way towards a peaceful and orderly resolution of the conflict. As I made clear when I addressed the UN General Assembly last September, what is happening in Syria is an affront to humanity, involving indiscriminate violence on an appalling scale which is not just confined to one side.

However, I equally made clear in my UNGA address that if events in the Arab world over the past two years have taught us anything, it is that leaders who deny legitimate demands for greater political and economic freedom, and who instead resort to waging war on their own people, will inevitably lose the right to rule. This clearly applies to Bashar al-Assad and the actions of his regime. It will ultimately be for the Syrian people to determine their own political future. The international community must encourage all possible steps to end the violence and to initiate a genuine, inclusive political process within Syria in which all Syrians can freely participate.

Ireland is fully supportive of the efforts being made by the UN/League of Arab States Joint Special Representative, Lakhdar Brahimi, to promote a political settlement. Mr. Brahimi enjoys the full confidence of the EU and of the international community as he endeavours to broker an early cease fire and to build on the earlier peace efforts undertaken by his predecessor, Kofi Annan. He is continuing to work closely with all members of the UN Security Council and with regional actors in an attempt to devise a political way forward. He has also recently met with Syrian Government and Opposition representatives.

There will also need to be accountability for the very many serious human rights violations and war crimes committed during the conflict. The latest report of the UN Commission of Inquiry has clearly recognised that opposition forces are also guilty of committing gross human rights violations, though to a lesser extent than the Syrian Government. Ireland has consistently and strongly condemned all abuses and crimes and has called for the perpetrators, no matter who they are, to be brought to justice. That is why I continue to support the calls which have been made for the situation in Syria to be referred by the Security Council to the International Criminal Court.

Ultimately, it remains for the Syrian people themselves to determine who should lead a new democratic, inclusive and pluralist Syria. Ireland and its EU and international partners will continue to support all efforts to end the violence and suffering of the Syrian people and to promote the earliest possible political settlement and transition within Syria.

International Relations

38. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will support the Argentina Republic on the issue of sovereignty of the Malvinas and to challenge the United Kingdom refusal to resume negotiations on this matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48864/12]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): The question of the Falkland Islands (Malvinas) has been the subject of resolutions adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations, as well as its special committee on decolonisation. In its most recent resolution, adopted on 14 June 2012, the committee expressed its regret that, in spite of the widespread international support for negotiation between the two Governments, implementation of General Assembly resolutions on the question had not yet started. The Governments were requested to consolidate the current process of dialogue and cooperation through the resumption of negotiations in order to find as soon as possible a peaceful solution to the dispute relating to the question of the Falkland Islands (Malvinas), in accordance with resolutions 2065 (XX) and 3160 (XXVIII), among others. I would encourage the UK and Argentina, two countries with which Ireland has excellent bilateral relations, to pursue a peaceful resolution of their differences on this matter, based on the relevant UN resolutions.

Pension Provisions

39. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Finance his views on correspondence regarding early access to pension funds (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48859/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am aware of the proposal from IBEC for pre-retirement access to be allowed for individuals to certain forms of pension saving arrangements, subject to conditions. This proposal is being examined although there are various difficulties associated with permitting early access to pension savings to which I have referred in previous replies to parliamentary questions on this issue. It is not clear to me, however, based on the details supplied with the Deputy's question, that the early access proposal would necessarily assist in the case of the specific example of the individual outlined.

VAT Rates Application

40. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Finance the impact on the tourism industry in 2012 of the temporary reduction to the VAT rate that applies to tourism products; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48909/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Finance (No. 2) Act 2011 provided for a second reduced VAT rate, of 9%, on a temporary basis in respect of certain tourism-related services and goods for the period 1 July 2011 to 31 December 2013. This measure is aimed at contributing towards boosting tourism and the creation of additional jobs in that sector. Initial analysis of the impact of 9% VAT rate indicates that employment numbers in the tourism and restaurant sector have increased and prices have reduced. In this context, I provided assurance to the tourist industry that the 9% rate will continue throughout 2013, as currently legislated for.

Insurance Costs

41. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Finance the progress he is making with insurance companies to ensure that reasonably priced flood insurance is provided for families and businesses in high flood-risk areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49023/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): At the outset the Deputy should note that individual decisions on pricing and underwriting are a commercial matter for insurance

companies and neither I, nor the Central Bank, has any influence over this matter. I have been informed that each application for flood cover is considered on a case by case basis, as this allows an insurance company to properly assess the risk it is accepting. The significance of these risks is reflected in the fact that the IIF has indicated that the cumulative cost of the eight major flood events since the year 2000 has been €697 million.

The State has made a significant contribution to reducing the threat of flooding through a very significant investment in major urban flood defence schemes since 1995 and this has been hugely beneficial in terms of properties protected and losses avoided. It is estimated that almost 8,000 properties have been protected to date and the value of the benefit deriving from that is of the order of €800 million.

The approach agreed by the Government in order to ensure reasonable priced flood insurance is provided is twofold and works to improve the availability of flood insurance cover by (a) continuing prioritising spending on flood relief measures by the OPW and relevant local authorities, and (b) improving channels of communication between the OPW and the insurance industry in order to reach better understanding about the provision of flood cover in marginal areas and how this can allow more effective insurance cover.

Continued communication between the insurance industry and the OPW is critical to ensure that individual underwriters are aware of what is being done in different parts of the country to address flooding problems including time scales, completion of flood prevention measures, level of expenditure and likely completion dates. In the same way a flow of information from the insurance industry will undoubtedly help the OPW and local authorities prioritise remedial works which in turn should provide greater reassurance to the industry that problem areas are being addressed in a structured way and this should lead to a greater willingness to provide cover in marginal areas.

As part of this, officials in the OPW have been working on developing a system for presenting information on flood defence schemes to the insurance industry to meet the technical requirements set out by the industry for risk assessment purposes. On 5 July 2012, the OPW made a presentation to the IIF and a number of the main insurance companies on a proposed template for providing the required information. The essential focus and objective of OPW's work has been in putting flood defence information on a GIS platform. This means that the information will be accessible and viewable in a mapping environment.

I understand that the IIF has indicated that it is in the process of collating the responses it has received from its members on the OPW information and it hopes to be in a position shortly to formally respond on this. I note that the Chief Executive of the IIF stated in a recent presentation to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Environment, Culture and the Gaeltacht that "one of the positive developments over the past couple of years is that there has been much more engagement on a bilateral basis with the OPW". He acknowledged that the flow of information is much improved and that the insurance industry is much more involved in the process.

Departmental Meetings

42. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Finance the number of occasions on which he or his officials have met with the Irish Bankers Federation; and the dates of the meetings. [48761/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): My Department has supplied me with the following list of dates in 2011 and 2012 that my officials met with officials of the Irish

Bankers Federation.

2011

3 February (1 meeting)

15 March (1 meeting)

13 April (1 meeting)

14 April (1 meeting)

15 April (1 meeting)

18 April (1 meeting)

25 May (1 meeting)

12 July (1 meeting)

11 August (1 meeting)

29 August (1 meeting)

22 September (1 meeting)

13 October (1 meeting)

2 November (1 meeting)

3 November (2 meetings)

10 November (1 meeting)

11 November (1 meeting)

16 December (1 meeting)

21 December (1 meeting)

2012

31 January (1 Meeting)

15 February (2 meetings)

28 February (1 meeting)

1 March (1 meeting)

16 April (1 meeting)

8 May (1 meeting)

9 May (1 meeting)

11 May (1 meeting)

14 May (1 meeting)

16 May (1 meeting)

23 May (1 meeting)

30 May (1 meeting)

20 June (1 meeting)

27 June (2 meetings)

5 July (1 meeting)

19 July (1 meeting)

24 July (1 meeting)

1 August (2 meetings)

22 August (1 meeting)

14 September (1 meeting)

18 September (1 meeting)

2 October (1 meeting)

23 October (1 meeting)

1 November (1 meeting)

6 November (2 meetings)

As Minister I have also met with the Irish Bankers Federation on one occasion, 16th May 2012

Banking Sector Remuneration

43. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide in tabular form, with respect to the Irish Bank Resolution Corporation, the number of the staff whose annual salary at 31 December 2011 fell in the following bands, €400,000 and above, €300,000 to €399,999, €200,000 to €299,999 and €150,000 to €199,999. [48795/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I have been advised by the Bank of the following information with regard to staff's annual salary as at 31st December 2011.

(Salary only)	Staff No's as at 31 Dec 2011 Ireland, UK and US
€0 - €99,000	1060
€100,000 - €149,000	108
€150,000 - €199,000	23
€200,000 - €299,000	21
€300,000 - €399,000	3
€400,000 - €499,000	5
€500,000+	1

Banking Sector Remuneration

44. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the salary paid to the Chief Executive Officer of the Irish Bank Resolution Corporation Mr Mike Aynsley and to provide a listing and quantification of any additional benefits paid; and in respect of any expenses allowance; if he will confirm if such allowances are paid only in respect of vouched and receipted expenditure. [48796/12]

45. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if he will confirm if the Chief Executive Officer of the Irish Bank Resolution Corporation Mr Mike Aynsley is employed on a temporary contract; the date on which this contract was entered into; the termination date of this contract and if he will quantify any termination payments provided for under the contract. [48797/12]

46. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if the Chief Executive Officer of the Irish Bank Resolution Corporation Mr Mike Aynsley is employed on a continuing or permanent contract and if he will quantify any termination payments provided for under the contract. [48798/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 44 to 46, inclusive, together.

I have been advised by IBRC that the CEO, Mike Aynsley, is a permanent employee of the Bank. Mr. Aynsley's contract was entered into in August 2009 and was effective from 7 September 2009. The normal termination date of the contract is upon the CEO's 60th birthday which is 24 March 2018. Standard termination payments in lieu of notice exist. All temporary allowances are paid only in respect of vouched and receipted expenditure.

-	2009	2010	2011	2012 forecast
-	€ ('000)	€ ('000)	€ ('000)	€ ('000)
Salary	€160	€500	€500	€500
Benefits	€18	€41	€38	€38
Pension	€40	€125	€125	€125
Temporary Allowances	€125	€294	€203	€0
Total	€343*	€960**	€866	€663

*Note: The amount of €343,000 differs to the figure of €329,000 reported in the Bank's Annual Report & Accounts 2009 as a result of adjustments made in the following year.

**Note: The amount of €960,000 differs to the figure of €974,000 reported in the Bank's Annual Report & Accounts 2010 as a result of adjustments made for 2009.

Banking Sector Remuneration

47. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if he has contacted the Irish Bank Resolution Corporation requesting staff whose annual salary is in excess of €200,000 to waive 15% of their salary or such amount in excess of €200,000 whichever is the lesser; and if he has, the date on which he first made this contact; the number of staff whose annual salaries were in excess of €200,000 at that date; the number of staff who acquiesced to the request for the waiver; the number of staff who refused the request for the waiver and the number of staff who have not responded to the request for the waiver. [48799/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): At a meeting on the 5th April 2012, I asked the Chairman of IBRC, Mr Alan Dukes, if the Board of the Bank would consider a

reduction of 15% in senior management salaries. Mr Dukes subsequently informed me that reductions in pay levels for individual staff in IBRC, (the entity tasked with winding down the former Anglo Irish Bank and INBS), had been considered by the Board of the Bank and that a decision had been reached not to implement cuts at that time. I am informed by the Bank that the decision not to pursue pay cuts was based on the difficulty faced by the Bank in retaining and attracting staff, and the fact that the remuneration packages paid to the new management team are lower than those historically paid by the Bank. Fees however for Non-Executive Directors were initially reduced by 20% at the end of 2008 and by a further 15% in July of 2012.

Tax Reliefs Availability

48. **Deputy Eoghan Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide details of all investment schemes currently operated by the State which involve some form of tax relief or similar, whereby persons investing money in small and medium sized enterprises may receive a portion of that investment back through the tax system; the maximum amount under each scheme which can be invested and the maximum rate of relief. [48847/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The schemes providing for tax relief for investment in small and medium-sized enterprises are as follows.

The Employment and Investment Incentive (EII)

EII is a tax incentive that provides tax relief for investors who purchase new ordinary shares in small and certain medium-sized companies carrying on a trade, and who hold those shares for a minimum of three years. The incentive is designed to help companies to raise new risk capital to expand their activities. An individual investor can obtain income tax relief on investments up to a maximum of €150,000 per annum, subject to the high income individuals' restriction, in each tax year up to 2013. The maximum amount that may be raised by a company in any 12 month period is €2.5 million, subject to a lifetime limit of €10 million.

The maximum rate of tax relief available to an individual who subscribes for new ordinary shares is 30% of the amount invested. However, a further 11% tax relief may be available at the end of the holding period, provided the company concerned has either increased its number of employees or spent at least 30% of the investment raised on research and development.

Seed Capital Scheme (SCS)

The SCS is designed for individuals who are or were in employment, which was subject to PAYE. In general, it operates by providing that an eligible individual, who makes an investment in new ordinary shares in a qualifying company, may set off the amount of that investment against his or her taxable income in any of the previous 6 years, which will result in an overpayment of tax. The individual may then claim a refund of the tax overpaid. For example, an individual, who makes an investment of €10,000 in new ordinary shares and who sets off the amount of that investment against his or her taxable income for a year of assessment in which his or her marginal rate of tax was 41%, will be entitled to claim a tax refund of €4,100.

The maximum investment that can be set against taxable income in any single year of assessment is €100,000. This means that the maximum total investment that can be made under the Seed Capital Scheme is €600,000, as the individual may set up to €100,000 against the taxable income of each of the previous 6 years.

An eligible individual is an individual who takes up full-time employment with the company and holds at least 15% of the issued ordinary share capital for the required period, normally

3 years.

A qualifying company is a new company that carries on a trade except where the activities of that trade consist of: (a) activities which were previously carried on by another person and to which the company has succeeded, or (b) activities which were previously carried on as part of another person's trade or profession.

Film Relief (Section 481)

The film relief scheme was introduced to promote the Irish film industry, by encouraging investment in Irish made films. Tax relief on the full amount of the investment is available to individual investors at their marginal rate of tax (41% for top rate taxpayers). Individual investors can invest up to €50,000 under the scheme in any year of assessment. The maximum amount which can be raised by a film production company, under the scheme is 80% of the total cost per production, subject to a maximum of €50,000,000.

Universal Social Charge Application

49. **Deputy Dominic Hannigan** asked the Minister for Finance the analysis he has undertaken to assess the number of persons who would voluntarily leave the country if the universal social charge was raised to 10% on earnings over €100,000; if he has any evidence that persons would leave if this was to be implemented; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48851/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): It is the standard practice for the Minister for Finance to review all tax expenditures and reliefs in the run up to the annual Budget. It is also a longstanding practice of the Minister for Finance not to comment, in advance of the Budget, on any tax matters that might be the subject of Budget decisions. However, in general, the marginal tax rate, which is described as the tax rate that applies to the last euro of the base, is an important consideration in the formulation of tax policy. Marginal tax rates are important because they influence individual decisions to work more. The OECD in its working paper 'Tax and Economic Growth' points to the "possibility that high top marginal rates will increase the average tax rates paid by high-skilled and high-income earners so much that they will migrate to countries with lower rates resulting in a brain drain which may lower innovative activity and productivity".

It is also important to point out that higher marginal tax rates for earners may also incentivise a greater level of tax evasion and contribute to the development of a shadow economy.

Regardless of the state of the economic cycle, gross migration flows to and from Ireland are very large in comparative terms, indicative of the extremely open nature of the Irish labour market. By way of background, net migration turned rapidly from positive to negative between the years ending April 2008 and April 2010, evidence of the rapid response of workers to labour market conditions in Ireland during that period.

NAMA Qualifying Investor Fund

50. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if he will outline the steps to be taken by the National Asset Management Agency to get its first Qualifying Investor Fund operational. [48912/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The National Asset Management Agen-

cy advises that it is acting as Promoter of the QIF and is taking all necessary steps towards obtaining regulatory approval for the QIF. The Deputy may wish to consider the Central Bank Guidance Note 2/96 - Promoters of Collective Investment Schemes for information about the role and responsibility of the Promoter.

NAMA Qualifying Investor Fund

51. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if he will quantify the number of persons who will comprise the board of the first qualified investor fund to be operated by the National Asset Management Agency and the way these persons will be selected for board membership and the remuneration that will attach to such positions.; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48914/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised that regulatory requirements stipulate that the Board must comprise a minimum of three suitably qualified directors. The National Asset Management Agency proposes to nominate one director. It is envisaged that the investment manager to the QIF will appoint one director and subsequent directors will be appointed by the QIF once it has been incorporated. The remuneration of persons appointed to the Board of the QIF will be determined by the Board once constituted.

Tax Reliefs Availability

52. **Deputy Dominic Hannigan** asked the Minister for Finance if tax reliefs are being examined as a part of the Budget proposals for 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48984/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Tax reliefs are kept under continuous review. However, as the Deputy will be aware, it would not be appropriate for me to comment in advance on possible Budget decisions.

Pension Provisions

53. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 95 of 25 September 2012, if it is possible for a person (details supplied) in County Kildare to obtain access to the full amount under the terms of approved minimum retirement fund or part thereof with an insurance company ; if it is possible to review the terms governing the operation and management of the investment in view of their changed economic circumstances; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49025/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): An Approved Minimum Retirement Fund (AMRF) is established where a person, who would otherwise be eligible to take retirement benefits from a pension arrangement in the form of either a taxable lump sum payment or investment in an Approved Retirement Fund (ARF), is unable to satisfy the “specified minimum income” requirement.

The “specified minimum income” requirement is a requirement that the person be in receipt of a guaranteed income for life of 1.5 times the annual rate of the State (Contributory) Pension, currently €18,000 per annum. Where the “specified minimum income” requirement is not met and if the person decides not to purchase an annuity, he/she, as an alternative, can invest in an AMRF. The “specified income requirement” applies to all AMRF holders

The capital amount that must be invested in an AMRF is 10 times the annual rate of the State (Contributory) Pension, currently €119,800 or, if lower, the balance of the pension fund after the person concerned has taken his/her permitted tax-free lump sum payment.

Unlike an ARF, only income growth in excess of the original capital investment may be withdrawn from an AMRF.

An AMRF converts into an ARF once the AMRF holder reaches the age of 75 years or he/she satisfies the “specified minimum income” requirement, at which point withdrawals of the capital may be made from the ARF (that is, the converted AMRF).

It is important to bear in mind that the capital in an AMRF may be used, at any time, to purchase an annuity that would be payable for the duration of the person’s life but the capital in the AMRF is not otherwise available to the beneficial owner of the AMRF. The reason for this is because the AMRF fund is designed to meet the income requirements in the latter part of a person’s life (that is, from the age 75 onwards) in a situation where that person does not have alternative income source/s of an amount that equates to 1.5 times the rate of the State (Contributory) Pension.

In my reply to the previous question referred to by the Deputy, I outlined in considerable detail the changes made to provide flexible options at retirement for individuals in Defined Contribution pension arrangements, including the rationale for the “specified minimum income” requirement and the approved minimum retirement fund (AMRF) outlined above. I also outlined the changes made in Finance Act 2011 to extend the flexible options and to modify the conditions relating thereto.

I understand from the Revenue Commissioners that the person referred to in the details supplied with this question took out his AMRF a little over a year ago and after the Finance Act 2011 changes but presumably in the knowledge of the conditions attaching to investment in such a fund.

At this point, the only immediate option open to the person concerned to access the capital in the AMRF (based on the information available) would be to use the funds to purchase a pension annuity. He would not be obliged to use all of the funds in the AMRF for this purpose unless he decided to do so and any lifetime pension annuity would count (together with any State Pension Contributory to which the person may be entitled in the future) towards meeting the “specified minimum income” requirement which, if or when satisfied, would allow any remaining AMRF funds to be converted to an Approved Retirement Fund (ARF) with unfettered access to the capital before age 75, subject to taxation.

I have no plans to adjust the “specified minimum income” requirement at this time. However, I have received a number of representations about the scale and timing of the increase in the requirement introduced in Finance Act 2011 and I will examine these matters again without prejudice in the context of next year’s Finance Bill.

Tax Collection

54. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Finance if and or when the Revenue Commissioners will be in a position to come to an agreement in the form of deferred payments or liability in the matter of outstanding income tax liability including penalties in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49026/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): This is a matter for the Revenue Commissioners. I am advised by Revenue that numerous efforts were made to meet the taxpayer concerned to give him an opportunity to discuss his affairs and resolve the outstanding issues. However, to date no engagement with the taxpayer has been forthcoming. Revenue also afforded the taxpayer and his agent the opportunity to file correct returns but to date this has not happened. I am advised by Revenue that no request has been received from the taxpayer or agent seeking an arrangement. If the taxpayer concerned engages with Revenue in a meaningful manner, then Revenue will work with the taxpayer to resolve the issue. If the taxpayer wishes to further discuss the outstanding issues, he should contact the Collector General's Office at (061) 488000.

Pension Provisions

55. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide in tabular form for each covered institution, the number of retired employees currently being paid a pension; if he will show separately the number currently in the employment of the covered institution but who will in due course be entitled to a pension, of between €100,000 to €200,000, between €200,001 and €300,000, between €300,001 and €400,000, between €400,001 and €500,000 and in excess of €500,000. [49037/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Unfortunately, it is not possible to supply the information the Deputy has requested at this time. My officials and officials in the covered institutions (in conjunction with certain of the trustees of the underlying pension schemes) are considering a number of issues, including the provisions of the Data Protection Act, which may prevent me from releasing some (or all) of the data which you have requested. Notwithstanding these issues, the production of this data is a time consuming task for certain of the covered institutions and the collection of the data has not yet been completed by them. I will write to the Deputy as soon as I am in a position to do so.

Pension Provisions

56. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he or his officials have had direct contact with Allied Irish Bank in relation to the commitment given by the Chairman of the bank at the last annual general meeting to contact the former chief executives of the bank to request a voluntary reduction in their pension entitlements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49038/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I understand that Department of Finance officials have been in contact with AIB in relation to this matter. I am informed that AIB has written to former senior executives at the bank requesting a voluntary contribution or reduction in their pension. This process is ongoing as other individuals are written to including former staff of EBS. I understand that this is a technically complex matter from a Tax and Revenue perspective which will require further analysis. However, at a minimum, former executives should they choose could make an after-tax contribution of a portion of their pension. As this is a voluntary request and given that there is a statutory prohibition on reducing pension amounts once the relevant pension is in payment, it will be a matter for the individuals concerned to agree to the amount and scope of the proposal.

Pension Provisions

57. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide detailed information on the €1.1 billion of gross loan assets transferred to the Allied Irish bank defined benefit pension scheme in August 2012 including details of the nature of the assets concerned and details of any impairment provision made against such assets. [49039/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): AIB confirmed in August 2012 that it agreed the transfer of €1.1 billion nominal of Irish loan assets to the AIB pension fund. I am informed by the Bank that the transfer of assets to the pension fund was undertaken to facilitate the early retirement component of the voluntary severance program of the bank. If the transfer of assets had not taken place, the early retirement component of the voluntary severance could not have proceeded as it would have required a cash contribution from the bank. It has been suggested by some that this transaction was designed to fund the grotesque pensions of former chief executives of the bank. This is not consistent with the facts and is a deliberate misrepresentation of the position. Given the need for cost savings in the bank, the alternative to the approach adopted by the bank would have been compulsory redundancy and retirement for serving staff. If this approach had been adopted, the former senior executives would continue to have been paid their massive pensions. The voluntary severance scheme in the bank overall is expected to result in annual savings to AIB in excess of €200 million which is a critical component of AIB's return to viability. Additionally, as part of its continuing strategy to meet non-core deleveraging targets as part of PLAR 2011, this transaction facilitated the deleveraging of a substantial non-core portfolio and was executed at a substantial discount to par value. AIB has informed me that it is not disclosing the discount level, but it was in line with the levels assumed as part of the PCAR exercise in 2011. The transaction was completed on an arm's length basis with both the bank and the pension trustees conducting independent valuations of the assets. This transaction was approved by the Board and the Bank's deleveraging committee which includes non-voting observers from the Department of Finance and the Central Bank. The bank also consulted with the Pensions Board as part of the process.

Pension Provisions

58. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if all retired Allied Irish bank employees currently in receipt of an occupational pension from the bank are paid out of the bank's defined benefit pension scheme. [49040/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am informed that AIB has a number of defined benefit schemes. All retired AIB employees, currently in receipt of an occupational pension from the bank, are paid out of one of these schemes.

Pension Provisions

59. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he will confirm the funding deficit in Allied Irish Bank's defined pension benefit pension scheme prior to the transfer of €1.1 billion of gross loan assets into the scheme in August 2012; and if he will confirm the funding position of the scheme at present. [49041/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): AIB Group's pension deficit as reported at 30 June 2012 in the bank's interim results was €1,457m. I am informed that this figure includes all of the Group's pension schemes, including the Irish defined benefit scheme. This figure is disclosed to the market on a semi-annual basis and updated figures will be reported in early 2013 in the bank's Annual Report for 2012. The transfer of assets to the pension fund

earlier this year was undertaken in order to facilitate the early retirement component of the voluntary severance program of the bank. Had the transfer of assets not taken place, the early retirement component of the voluntary severance could not have proceeded as it would have required a cash contribution from the bank. The voluntary severance scheme in the bank overall is expected to result in annual savings to AIB in excess of €200m which is a critical component of AIB's return to long term viability.

Pension Provisions

60. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if all current employees of Allied Irish Bank have now been transferred to a new defined contribution scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49042/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am informed by the bank that staff were advised on the 14th June 2012 of its intention to close the defined benefit schemes to future accrual. Following this announcement the bank commenced a consultation process with unions representing staff in line with agreed procedures. It is currently anticipated that agreement with the unions will be in place before the end of 2012.

Pension Provisions

61. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 52 of 24 October 2012, if he considered requesting the bank to make a section 50 application to the Pension Board to reduce the benefits payable to retired chief executive and other returned senior executives of the bank as part of the transfer of assets into the pension scheme to meet the new funding requirements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49043/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): AIB has informed me that it understands that an application under section 50 would not apply to pensions already in payment.

Services for People with Disabilities

62. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will update Dáil Éireann on the role of his Department and associated agencies in educating and creating awareness amongst employers regarding the needs of persons with Spina Bifida and persons with Hydrocephalus. [48771/12]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The policy of my Department is to promote the principle of inclusive education for children with special educational needs.

My Department, either directly or through the National Council for Special Education, provides for a range of supports in schools to enable them to cater for students with special educational needs, including Spina Bifida or Hydrocephalus. This may include additional Resource Teachers, Special Needs Assistants and specialist equipment, depending on a child's level of assessed needs.

Where children have such complex special educational needs which cannot be provided for in mainstream classrooms a special school or special class placement may be required. This is also provided for by my Department. Where children with special needs also require physical

or sensory therapy supports, this support is provided by the Health Service Executive, and may be provided in schools.

In order to provide further assistance and information for parents and schools, the NCSE has published a comprehensive Information Booklet for Parents of Children with Special Educational Needs. This booklet provides information on the full range of educational supports available in schools for children with special educational needs and is available to access/download from the NCSE website. I understand it is the intention of the NCSE to produce individual information pamphlets deriving from this booklet for individual disability categories.

In general, all employers are required to have cognisance of the employment and equality legislation in relation to the employment of people with disabilities. I understand that FÁS also operates a Disability Awareness Support Scheme for companies employing people with disabilities, operated through their Employment Services under the aegis of the Department of Social Protection. The Deputy may wish to seek further information regarding guidance for employers in relation to the employment of people with disabilities, from the Ministers for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation and Social Protection.

Question No. 63 withdrawn.

Student Grant Scheme Applications

64. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding a decision on an application for a student grant in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Offaly. [48786/12]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The decision on eligibility for new student grant applications from the 2012/13 academic year is a matter for the new centralised grant awarding authority, SUSI (Student Universal Support Ireland). Officials in my Department have confirmed with SUSI, the new centralised grant awarding authority, that further supporting documentation was requested on 2nd October 2012 from the student referred to by the Deputy. When the documentation is returned to SUSI the student will be notified directly of the outcome.

Student Grant Scheme Applications

65. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding a decision on an application for a student grant in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Offaly. [48787/12]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The decision on eligibility for new student grant applications from the 2012/13 academic year is a matter for the new centralised grant awarding authority, SUSI (Student Universal Support Ireland). Officials in my Department have confirmed with SUSI, the new centralised grant awarding authority, that on 18th October 2012 an additional letter issued to the student referred to by the Deputy requesting supporting documentation. When the documentation is returned to SUSI the student will be notified directly of the outcome.

Student Grant Scheme Applications

66. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding a decision on an application for a student grant in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Offaly. [48788/12]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The decision on eligibility for new student grant applications from the 2012/13 academic year is a matter for the new centralised grant awarding authority, SUSI (Student Universal Support Ireland). The student referred to by the Deputy had her application cancelled by SUSI as it was incomplete. On 24th August, 2012 a letter was issued by SUSI to the student informing her that her application was cancelled and advising her to reapply. When re-applying for a student grant it will be necessary for the student to complete all sections of the application form.

Student Grant Scheme Applications

67. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding a decision on an application for a student grant in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Offaly [48789/12]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The decision on eligibility for new student grant applications from the 2012/13 academic year is a matter for the new centralised grant awarding authority, SUSI (Student Universal Support Ireland). Officials in my Department have confirmed with SUSI, the new centralised grant awarding authority, that on 25th October 2012 a letter issued to the student referred to by the Deputy requesting additional supporting documentation. When the documentation is returned to the grant awarding authority the student will be notified directly of the outcome.

School Transport Eligibility

68. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding a school bus ticket in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48812/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): Under the terms of my Department's Post Primary School Transport Scheme, children are eligible for transport where they reside not less than 4.8 kms from and are attending their nearest education centre as determined by my Department/Bus Éireann, having regard to ethos and language. Bus Éireann, which operates the school transport scheme on behalf of my Department, has advised that the child in question is not attending his nearest education centre and is therefore not eligible for school transport. Children who are not eligible for school transport under the terms of the scheme may apply to Bus Éireann for transport on a concessionary basis provided there are spare seats available on the service, and the appropriate annual charge is paid. The family should liaise with their local Bus Éireann office if they wish to avail of school transport on a concessionary basis.

Student Grant Scheme Eligibility

69. **Deputy Arthur Spring** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he intends to adjust the student maintenance grant, either by reducing the grant rates or by tightening the conditions for eligibility. [48817/12]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The Deputy will appreciate that as the preparation of the Estimates for any Budget including Budget 2013 is carried out on a strictly confidential basis, it would not be appropriate for me to comment on specific issues or proposals, including those relating to student grants, in advance of the Budget announcement.

Student Grant Scheme Applications

70. **Deputy Patrick Nulty** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a student grant application in respect of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 15 will be expedited; the reason for the delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48823/12]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The decision on eligibility for a student grant is a matter, in the first instance, for the relevant grant awarding authority, which in this case is County Dublin VEC. Officials in my Department have confirmed with County Dublin VEC that a decision letter will issue shortly to the student referred to by the Deputy.

Student Grant Scheme Applications

71. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will expedite the Student Universal Support Ireland grant application in respect of a person (details supplied). [48829/12]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Officials in my Department have confirmed with Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI), the new centralised awarding authority, that the grant application of the student referred to by the Deputy for the 2012/13 academic year was refused. SUSI has confirmed that the applicant appealed their decision and a letter on the appeal issued on 23rd October, 2012.

Where an individual applicant has had an appeal turned down, in writing, by SUSI, and remains of the view that SUSI has not interpreted the scheme correctly in his/her case, an appeal form outlining the position may be submitted by the applicant to the Student Grant Appeals Board. The relevant appeal form will be available on request from SUSI.

Student Grant Scheme Applications

72. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will expedite the Student Universal Support Ireland in respect of a person (details supplied). [48830/12]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The decision on eligibility for new student grant applications from the 2012/13 academic year is a matter for the new centralised grant awarding authority, SUSI (Student Universal Support Ireland). Officials in my Department have confirmed with SUSI, the new centralised grant awarding authority, that on 23rd October 2012 a letter issued to the student referred to by the Deputy requesting additional supporting documentation. When the outstanding documentation is returned to the grant awarding authority the student will be notified directly of the outcome.

Student Grant Scheme Applications

73. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will expedite the Student Universal Support Ireland in respect of a person (details supplied). [48831/12]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The decision on eligibility for new student grant applications from the 2012/13 academic year is a matter for the new centralised grant awarding authority, SUSI (Student Universal Support Ireland). Officials in my Department have confirmed with SUSI that additional documentation requested from the student referred to by the Deputy was received on 1st November, 2012. The documentation is currently awaiting review and the student will be notified directly of the outcome.

Student Grant Scheme Applications

74. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will expedite the Student Universal Support Ireland in respect of a person (details supplied). [48832/12]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The decision on eligibility for new student grant applications from the 2012/13 academic year is a matter for the new centralised grant awarding authority, SUSI (Student Universal Support Ireland).

Officials in my Department have confirmed with SUSI, the new centralised grant awarding authority, that on 1st October 2012 a letter issued to the student referred to by the Deputy requesting additional supporting documentation. When the outstanding documentation is returned to the grant awarding authority the student will be notified directly of the outcome

Student Grant Scheme Applications

75. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will expedite the Student Universal Support Ireland in respect of a person (details supplied). [48833/12]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The decision on eligibility for new student grant applications from the 2012/13 academic year is a matter for the new centralised grant awarding authority, SUSI (Student Universal Support Ireland).

Officials in my Department have confirmed with SUSI, the new centralised grant awarding authority, that on 22nd August 2012 a request for supporting documentation was issued to the student referred to by the Deputy. When the requested documentation is returned to the grant awarding authority the student will be notified directly of the outcome.

Student Grant Scheme Applications

76. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will expedite the Student Universal Support Ireland in respect of a person (details supplied). [48834/12]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The decision on eligibility for new student grant applications from the 2012/13 academic year is a matter for the new centralised grant awarding authority, SUSI (Student Universal Support Ireland).

Officials in my Department have confirmed with SUSI that the Final Course Acceptance form was received from the student referred to by the Deputy on 16th October, 2012. The documentation is currently awaiting review and the student will be notified directly of the outcome.

Teaching Qualifications

77. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason the General Teachers' Council of Ireland does not automatically recognise universities in the Six Counties as offering approved teacher training courses including colleges such as St. Mary's University College, Belfast, which are globally recognised for their standards of excellence in teacher training. [48835/12]

78. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the paperwork the General Teachers' Council of Ireland require when assessing degree holders who hold a B.Ed (Hons), from a teaching college in the North and who are applying to be registered teachers in the 26 Counties. [48836/12]

79. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the co operation that exists between the General Teachers' Council of Ireland and the General Teachers' Council, Northern Ireland and if there are set protocols in place to deal with applications for teachers attempting to register in either jurisdiction. [48837/12]

80. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will confirm that the cost of assessment of qualifications with the General Teachers' Council of Ireland for a teacher registering from the North is €290; his views on whether is this an excessive amount to be paid by Irish nationals who have attended an Irish University in the Six Counties. [48838/12]

81. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the general Teachers' Council of Ireland view qualifications obtained from St. Mary's Teaching College, Belfast of adequate standard to qualify for teaching in the 26 counties. [48839/12]

82. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the procedures the General Teachers' Council of Ireland implement when checking a teaching applicant from the North of Ireland; if they communicate directly with their counterparts in the North to ascertain their qualifications, experience and references; the average turnaround for processing such applications and the efforts that are being made to ensure enhanced cooperation between the GTCI and the General Teachers Council of Northern Ireland. [48840/12]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I propose to take Questions Nos. 77 to 82, inclusive, together.

As the Deputy is aware, An Chomhairle Mhúinteoireachta, The Teaching Council, was established on a statutory basis in March 2006 under the terms of the Teaching Council Act 2001. As the regulatory body for the teaching profession in this State, it carries out a similar role to that of the General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (GTCNI). Among the statutory functions of the Council are the maintenance of a Register of Teachers, the operation of a process for determining suitability for entry onto that Register and the review & accreditation of programmes of initial teacher education.

While the Council's remit is as regulator in this State, it automatically recognises the qualifications of graduates of a number of teacher education programmes in Northern Ireland. These include the Bachelor of Education - Primary (Irish Studies), the Primary PGCE (Irish Medium) from St. Mary's Belfast and the Post-primary PGCE from University of Ulster.

As provided for in the Teaching Council Act the Council works closely with my Department in collaborating with the General Teaching Council of Northern Ireland on areas of mutual interest. The cost to potential registrants of assessment of their qualifications reflects the

Council's need to give full consideration to each application on its own merits. Details of the application process for recognition of qualifications from outside the State are set out on the Teaching Council's website and the Council will assist applicants with this process should they wish to seek the advice of the Council directly.

Matters in relation to teacher qualifications on the island are under discussion at the North South Ministerial Council and between the two Councils at present. The Councils have been requested to review current arrangements and advise on measures that will simplify current procedures and facilitate mobility having regard to the different policy contexts in both parts of the island.

Third Level Courses Availability

83. **Deputy Michael McCarthy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his position on a recommendation within the recent Higher Education Authority report to remove home economics initial teacher education from a campus (details supplied) in County Sligo and to relocate to NUI Galway campus; if his attention has been drawn to the concerns of education providers at the campus regarding this issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48889/12]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I have accepted the recommendations set out in a report commissioned by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) on the structures of initial teacher education. The purpose of the report, which I requested, was to identify new possible structures to improve initial teacher education in Ireland so that it is comparable with the best in the world. The international panel of education experts recommended that teacher education be provided in six "centres for teacher education". Currently there are 19 state funded providers of ITE (and three non-state funded) offering more than 40 college programmes in primary and post-primary teaching. The new collaborations recommended by the international panel will mean that a smaller number of centres for ITE exist, but that they offer education across multiple sectors from early childhood to primary, to post primary to adult education. These centres for teacher education will also possess a critical mass in terms of research capacity which is not always possible in smaller institutions. The new configurations will mean strong research bases can be created in each centre.

The HEA has been requested to consult with the relevant parties and to prepare a detailed plan on how to implement the recommendations of the Panel. I understand that this process has started and a plan is expected by the end of the year. I will fully consider the implementation plan from the HEA when received.

Public Sector Allowances Review

84. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding an allowance in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48919/12]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): When the moratorium was introduced the Government exempted Principal and Deputy Principal posts in all primary and post-primary schools and these continue to be replaced in the normal manner. The impact of the moratorium is therefore limited to the Director of Adult Education, Assistant Principal and Special Duties allowances payable to teachers on promotion. Vacancies at this level arise due to retirements in the specific grades and typically also from the knock on effect of filling Principal

and Deputy Principal posts.

Interim alleviation measures were announced in August 2012 for schools that are acutely affected by the impact of the moratorium at Assistant Principal level. School Management bodies were notified of these arrangements at the beginning of the current school year. Applications for alleviation have been received from 127 post primary schools. These applications have been processed and schools have been notified of the outcome in the recent weeks. Following the review of allowances by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, my Department is currently in the process of contacting schools (including the school referred to by the Deputy) that had sought approval to fill vacant assistant principal posts last January and were subsequently unable to complete the appointment process pending the outcome of the review.

Student Grant Scheme Applications

85. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a person (details supplied) in County Carlow will receive a decision on her Student Universal Support Ireland application. [48987/12]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Officials in my Department have confirmed with SUSI, the new centralised grant awarding authority, that the student referred to by the Deputy has been awarded a grant and an award letter has issued to the student.

Disadvantaged Status

86. **Deputy Seán Ó Feargháil** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number and location of amalgamated new schools which have lost full DEIS status as a result of their amalgamation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49050/12]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): There are currently seven amalgamated schools comprising DEIS and non-DEIS schools, one at primary level in Sligo and six at post-primary level in counties Galway, Wicklow, Laois, Limerick, Mayo and Kildare. In the case of an amalgamation involving DEIS and non-DEIS schools, while DEIS status does not transfer to the newly amalgamated school, it is the practice of the Department to continue with the provision of DEIS supports under the DEIS programme to the newly amalgamated school in respect of the number of eligible pupils from the former DEIS school/s.

Flood Relief Schemes Expenditure

87. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the amount that his Department spent on flood alleviation schemes in counties Longford and Westmeath for the years, 2009, 2010, 2011 and to date in 2012; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49015/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brian Hayes): The Office of Public Works currently administers the Minor Flood Mitigation Works Scheme. The Scheme was introduced in 2009 and provides funding to local authorities to undertake small-scale alleviation measures to address flooding problems within their administrative areas. Details of the payments made to Longford and Westmeath County Councils under this scheme for the years concerned are given in the following tables.

Longford County Council	Year	Funding paid in year
	2009	€0
	2010	€201,936
	2011	€261,058
	2012	€0
	Total	€462,994
Westmeath County Council	Year	Funding paid in year
	2009	€90,000
	2010	€54,000
	2011	€83,128
	2012	€0
	Total	€227,128

In addition, expenditure under the OPW's ongoing arterial drainage maintenance programme for the Mullingar depot for the years in question is:

2009	2010	2011	2012 to end Oct.	Total
€ 1,547,169	€ 1,520,945	€ 1,434,856	€1,101,908	€5,604,87

Departmental Agencies Issues

88. **Deputy Patrick Nulty** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the position regarding plans to merge the Forensic Science laboratory into the State Laboratory; his views on whether the merger would be a retrograde step; if he will confirm that a recent review carried out by his Department accepts that there will be no significant savings as a result of a merger; his views on concerns raised by many persons that if the merger proceeds, Ireland will be the only EU member state, apart from the UK, without a publicly funded laboratory or institute dedicated to forensic science; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the privatisation of forensic science services in the UK has been of concern to many eminent scientists there; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48814/12]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): Some 46 critical reviews of State bodies were undertaken as part of the Public Service Reform plan, published in November 2011. I updated my Government colleagues on the rationalisation of state agencies on 31st October 2012.

Critical review No.19 of the Agency Rationalisation Programme recommended the merger of the Forensic Science Laboratory into the State Laboratory upon co-location on the Backweston Campus. The review set out that the laboratories have distinct functions and roles as well as different reporting relationships and governance structures. Nonetheless, given the commonalities in certain professional and scientific aspects of their work, there is scope for operational and support synergies and for this reason the Forensic Science Laboratory will be brought within the ambit of the State Laboratory. The operational environment of the Forensic Science Laboratory in the criminal justice system will not be affected by this measure. The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the Department of Justice and Equality will engage with the two laboratories to identify how best to progress these synergies by the end of 2013.

Departmental Properties

90. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when the current lease arrangements at the Irish Life Centre, Dublin 1 will cease; the number of public servants based in the Irish Life Centre and the vacant capacity within the lease arrangement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48871/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brian Hayes): The Commissioners of Public Works currently hold six leases, which span a number of buildings in the Irish Life complex. The position in relation to each lease is outlined below. The Commissioners do not, however, have current details of the number of staff in each building.

Block 1

The Commissioners lease space in Block 1, which expires at the end of January 2013 and is targeted for surrender on that date.

Block 2

The Commissioners lease space in Block 2 for the Valuation Office, which expires on 30 September 2022. As part of the Commissioners' rationalisation programme, plans are advanced to make space available within Block 2 to another State authority, thus optimising space utilisation in the building.

Block 5 – 7

The Commissioners also lease space in Block 5-7, which expires on 31 August 2013. At present, the Department of Arts, Heritage and Gaeltacht's Archaeological Services unit and the Department of Social Protection's General Registry Office are located in the building. The usage of the building is currently being reviewed with a view to rationalising any space that is surplus to requirements.

Block D-E-F

The Commissioners currently hold three leases in Block D-E-F. The space held under one lease is occupied by COMREG and expires on 29 February 2020. The space held under the second and third leases is occupied by the Food Safety Authority of Ireland. Both of these leases expire on 30 April 2017. The Commissioners are not currently aware of any spare capacity in this building.

Public Sector Staff Issues

91. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the total number of public servants based in the Property Registration Authority building, Golf Links Road, Roscommon and the maximum staffing capacity of the building; the corresponding figures for the public offices on the Convent Road, Roscommon Town; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48872/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brian Hayes): The Commissioners of Public Works recently assessed the occupancy levels of the buildings at Golf Links Road and Convent Road, Roscommon. These assessments were designed to provide a snapshot of the occupancy levels at that point in time and to gauge the potential to accommodate additional staff.

The assessment of the building at Golf Links Road showed a total of 155 staff in occupation. The Golf Links Road building was built to accommodate approximately 230 staff. The Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry have now been allocated space within the building and approximately 50 of their staff are due to move from Convent Road into Gold Links Road by the end of 2012, following which the building will be practically at full capacity.

The assessment of the building at Convent Road indicated a total of 129 staff in occupation, (including the Department of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries staff due to move to Golf Links Road). As part of the Commissioners' ongoing rationalisation programme, there are two projects currently under way which will see space being made available to a further 59 additional staff. The first project involves the development of a back office and training facility for An Garda Síochána. The second project involves the creation of a new public office for the Department of Social Protection, which will incorporate Employment Services and Community Welfare Services. My officials have also been in discussion with the Health Service Executive and any remaining space that might still be available after these moves, has been earmarked for their use.

Departmental Properties

92. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the total number of staff employed by the Ordnance Survey of Ireland at each of its offices; if the property is leased, and if so when the lease expires; the maximum staffing capacity of leased properties; the future plans if any for each property; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48873/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brian Hayes): Ordnance Survey Ireland have staff based at the following locations:

- Phoenix Park Headquarters (State-owned)
- Cork Government Offices (State-owned)
- Longford Government Offices (State-owned)
- Ennis Government Offices (State-owned)
- Kilkenny Government Offices (State-owned)
- Westward Centre, Sligo (leased)
- Airglorney House, Tuam (leased)

The expiration dates for the leased accommodation are:

- Sligo, 31st August, 2017 and
- Tuam, 31st August, 2014

The Ordnance Survey would be best positioned to advise as to the latest staffing in the buildings occupied by them.

No determination has been made on the future of any of the Ordnance Survey Offices and any such future determination will be made in consultation with that body.

Departmental Properties

93. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the total number of staff employed by the Valuation Office at each of its offices; if the property is leased, and if so when the lease expires; the maximum staffing capacity of leased properties; the future plans if any for each property; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48875/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brian Hayes): The Valuation Office is located in Block 2, Irish Life Centre, Dublin 1, which is held under lease by the Commissioners of Public Works and expires on 30th September 2022. The Valuation Office would be best positioned to advise on the latest staff numbers in the building.

As part of the Commissioners' rationalisation programme, plans are advanced for the relocation of other State employees to space within Block 2 to maximise space utilisation within the building.

Garda Stations Refurbishment

94. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to refurbish Howth Garda Station, County Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48880/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brian Hayes): The Commissioners of Public Works undertake works at Garda Stations in line with priorities set by An Garda Síochána. The Commissioners do not currently have a request for works at Howth Garda Station. However, if such a request is made, due consideration will be given at that stage.

Public Sector Staff Issues

95. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will furnish a schedule of employment progress by calendar year since the Croke Park Agreement commenced for Government Departments and their agencies in tabular form; if he will make a statement in cases where the percentage figures in the agencies seem to exceed those for their parent Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49003/12]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The data requested by the Deputy is given in the table.

Decisions in relation to the allocation of staffing resources between an individual Department and its agencies is a matter, in the first instance, for the management of the Department concerned having regard to a wide range of factors including the remit of the respective bodies, the relative priority of their functions, the profile of their staffing and financial resources, the potential for achieving efficiencies in the delivery of public services and a range of Government policies including those relating to expenditure, public service numbers, agency rationalisation and public service reform.

Table 1

PUBLIC SERVICE NUMBERS	2010	2011	2012
	End Qtr4	End Qtr4	End Qtr3
Department	305,967.26	297,327.24	290,705.20
TAOISEACH GROUP	1,999.39	1,977.94	1,862.98
ATTORNEY GENERAL	124.50	125.40	128.20
Law Reform Commission	18.50	16.00	18.00
CENTRAL STATISTICS OFFICE	767.23	808.21	662.77
CHIEF STATE SOLICITOR	226.33	222.73	218.46
DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC PROSECUTIONS	194.40	195.50	192.00
OIREACHTAS	455.27	436.37	431.12
TAOISEACH	193.76	154.53	194.23
National Economic and Social Development Office	19.40	19.20	18.20
FINANCE GROUP	6,823.19	6,392.44	6,144.30
APPEAL COMMISSIONERS	5.00	5.00	5.00
COMPTROLLER & AUDITOR GENERAL	155.50	151.80	134.80
FINANCE	537.96	278.50	309.39
Special EU Programmes Body (2011 Transfer to PER)	62.00	.00	.00
REVENUE COMMISSIONERS	6,062.73	5,957.14	5,695.11
JUSTICE GROUP	24,063.83	23,629.76	22,763.80
COURTS SERVICE	998.63	955.02	921.18
GARDA CIVILIANS	2,097.73	2,092.29	2,050.64
Garda	14,386.50	13,912.50	13,532.00
Justice & Equality	2,139.66	2,217.27	2,131.75
Centres for Young Offenders (2012 Transfer to Children)	227.48	217.25	.00

PUBLIC SERVICE NUMBERS	2010	2011	2012
Legal Aid Board (2012 Moved to NCSA)	108.00	108.00	.00
Family Mediation Service	.00	22.81	27.65
Human Rights Commission	.00	12.00	.00
Legal Aid Board	.00	.00	110.30
National Disability Authority	.00	32.50	30.58
PRISONS	3,521.42	3,488.81	3,409.60
PROPERTY REGISTRATION-AUTHORITY	584.41	571.31	550.10
ENVIRONMENT	32,729.21	31,121.23	30,064.57
ENVIRONMENT, COMMUNITY & LOCAL GOVERNMENT	1,162.22	812.21	778.98
An Bord Pleanála	164.20	156.20	146.00
An Chomhairle Leabharlanna	16.10	14.10	6.30
Dublin Docklands Development Authority	25.00	18.00	14.00
Environmental Protection Agency	328.30	322.70	313.10
Housing Finance Agency	11.00	11.00	10.00
Interim Housing & Sustainable Communities Agency	.00	39.20	39.97
Irish Water Safety	5.00	6.00	6.00
Limerick North-side Regeneration Agency	8.00	8.00	.00
Limerick South-side Regeneration Agency	8.00	8.00	.00
Local Government Computer Services Board	84.50	80.00	76.30
Local Government Management Services Board	27.50	26.70	24.70

Questions - Written Answers

PUBLIC SERVICE NUMBERS	2010	2011	2012
National Building Agency	43.35	3.80	.00
Private Residential Tenancies Board	65.40	50.40	46.40
Radiological Protection Institute of Ireland	46.60	45.20	41.40
Western Development Commission	.00	13.40	12.40
Affordable Homes Partnership (Retired 2010)	16.00	.00	.00
Environmental Research Unit	.00	.00	.00
Heritage Council (2011 Transfer to ART)	15.00	.00	.00

Table 2

LOCAL AUTHORITIES	30,703.04	29,506.32	28,549.02
City Council - Cork	1,360.00	1,322.00	1,273.95
City Council - Dublin	6,241.40	6,016.45	5,798.25
City Council - Galway	436.30	431.84	436.81
City Council - Limerick	484.41	464.14	441.80
City Council - Waterford	372.93	359.09	337.00
County Council - Carlow	295.24	283.41	274.81
County Council - Cavan	427.09	409.30	379.50
County Council - Clare	802.19	777.50	753.12
County Council - Cork	2,240.16	2,169.11	2,109.42
County Council - Donegal	988.11	948.14	920.32
County Council - Dun Laoire	1,129.40	1,049.60	1,025.70
County Council - Fingal	1,427.30	1,377.30	1,334.70

LOCAL AUTHORITIES	30,703.04	29,506.32	28,549.02
County Council - Galway	843.87	808.61	777.56
County Council - Kerry	1,188.63	1,159.77	1,137.56
County Council - Kildare	913.50	870.00	843.94
County Council - Kilkenny	541.64	525.49	505.00
County Council - Laois	388.79	364.88	345.90
County Council - Leitrim	293.85	278.13	268.17
County Council - Limerick	677.38	648.65	632.32
County Council - Longford	302.01	295.94	287.45
County Council - Louth	670.64	648.64	651.31
County Council - Mayo	1,097.65	1,055.50	997.53
County Council - Meath	665.82	638.64	626.13
County Council - Monaghan	407.72	399.69	386.45
County Council - Offaly	416.50	397.00	388.72
County Council - Roscommon	481.12	455.07	433.68
County Council - Sligo	500.45	478.74	457.38
County Council - South Dublin	1,329.20	1,261.30	1,178.65
County Council - Tipperary North	514.57	467.83	484.88
County Council - Tipperary South	648.10	629.26	607.31
County Council - Waterford	495.61	468.00	444.06
County Council - Westmeath	479.43	461.79	446.11
County Council - Wexford	780.38	757.76	726.98
County Council - Wicklow	786.45	744.05	755.65
Regional Assemblies	37.00	36.00	36.00
Regional Authorities	38.20	47.70	44.90

Questions - Written Answers

EDUCATION GROUP	97,682.00	94,582.74	93,037.07
COMMISSION INTO CHILD ABUSE	3.00	3.00	3.00
EDUCATION & SKILLS	1,287.06	1,247.87	1,217.67
NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR CURRICULUM & ASSESSMENT	26.00	22.80	25.50
NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION	107.10	105.60	101.00
RESIDENTIAL INSTITUTION REDRESS BOARD	27.00	28.50	21.70
STATE EXAMS COMMISSION	153.79	146.79	188.49
Church of Ireland College of Education	31.00	29.30	26.80
Dublin Dental Hospital	135.50	132.00	130.50
Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies - Core Posts (Cat 1)	64.00	60.50	56.50
First Level Education	41,359.00	40,568.00	40,692.00
Institutes Of Technology - Core Posts (Cat 1)	8,198.22	7,397.96	7,217.58
Royal Irish Academy	78.25	70.00	68.65
Royal Irish Academy of Music	64.00	64.50	60.60
Second Level Education	32,989.65	32,348.00	31,738.60
Universities/HEA Institutions - Core Posts (Cat 1)	10,907.11	10,275.81	10,195.76
Foras Áiseanna Saothair	1,936.22	1,882.06	1,103.72
Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC)	37.00	36.00	34.65
Grangegorman Development Agency	4.00	7.00	6.50

EDUCATION GROUP	97,682.00	94,582.74	93,037.07
Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC)	31.00	27.80	24.05
Higher Education Authority	53.20	52.20	59.00
National Centre for Technology & Education	17.00	16.00	14.00
National Qualifications Authority of Ireland	24.80	24.95	21.00
The Teaching Council	37.50	27.50	29.80
Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies (2010 Transfer to 3rd Level)	.00	.00	.00
Irish Research Council for Humanities & Social Science (2012 Merged HEA)	4.60	4.60	.00
Irish Research Council for Science, Eng & Technology (2012 Merged HEA)	5.00	4.00	.00
National Education Welfare Board (2011 Transfer to Children)	101.00	.00	.00
Royal Irish Academy (2010 Transfer to 3rd Level)	.00	.00	.00
Royal Irish Academy of Music (2010 Transfer to 3rd Level)	.00	.00	.00
COMMUNITY, EQUALITY & GAELTACHT AFFAIRS	1,023.03	.00	.00
CHARITABLE DONATIONS & BEQUESTS	2.00	.00	.00
COMMUNITY, EQUALITY & GAELTACHT AFFAIRS	377.91	.00	.00

Questions - Written Answers

EDUCATION GROUP	97,682.00	94,582.74	93,037.07
Boord o Ulster-Scotch (An Foras Teanga) (2011 Transfer to ART)	20.54	.00	.00
Family Support Agency (2011 Transfer to Children)	36.60	.00	.00
Foras na Gaeilge (An Foras Teanga) (2011 Transfer to ART)	65.00	.00	.00
Human Rights Commission (2011 Transfer to JUST)	12.00	.00	.00
National Disability Authority (2011 Transfer to JUST)	36.60	.00	.00
Údarás na Gaeltachta (2011 Transfer to ART)	93.72	.00	.00
Waterways Ireland (2011 Transfer to ART)	364.26	.00	.00
Western Development Commission (2011 Transfer to ENV)	14.40	.00	.00

Table 3

FOREIGN AFFAIRS	1,521.85	1,442.70	1,418.60
FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND TRADE	1,341.55	1,255.40	1,234.10
INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION	180.30	187.30	184.50
COMMUNICATIONS ENERGY & NAT. RESOURCES	1,267.45	1,235.32	1,164.30
COMMUNICATIONS ENERGY & NAT. RESOURCES	261.17	258.28	243.83
Broadcasting Authority of Ireland	32.96	32.19	31.19
Commission for Communication Regulation	125.00	120.00	109.00

FOREIGN AFFAIRS	1,521.85	1,442.70	1,418.60
Commission for Energy Regulation	65.22	71.90	66.62
Digital Hub Development Authority	15.50	13.50	13.00
Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission	55.00	56.00	56.50
Inland Fisheries Ireland	354.40	341.25	335.76
National Oil Reserves Agency	5.00	6.00	6.00
Ordnance Survey Ireland	290.20	275.20	243.80
Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland	63.00	61.00	58.60
AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND MARINE	5,477.88	5,207.58	4,919.58
AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND MARINE	3,654.93	3,522.28	3,288.57
Bord Bia	104.45	92.80	89.80
Bord Iascaigh Mhara	125.70	117.70	118.70
Marine Institute	192.10	186.10	182.10
National Milk Agency	5.00	5.00	5.00
Sea Fisheries Protection Authority	99.50	93.20	87.76
Teagasc	1,296.20	1,190.50	1,147.65
TRANSPORT	1,054.91	1,550.00	1,557.36
TRANSPORT, TOURSIM AND SPORT	493.14	494.42	467.79
Commission for Aviation Regulation	18.00	14.70	16.40
Fáilte Ireland	.00	326.39	373.09
Irish Sports Council	.00	26.40	25.40
Medical Bureau of Road Safety	34.50	35.50	33.00
National Roads Authority	133.20	122.00	109.00
National Sports Campus Dev Authority	.00	3.60	3.60
National Transport Authority	33.00	58.00	63.00

Questions - Written Answers

FOREIGN AFFAIRS	1,521.85	1,442.70	1,418.60
Railway Safety Commission	12.00	11.00	11.00
Road Safety Authority	298.77	284.69	275.58
SFADCo (Tourism)	.00	23.00	22.50
Tourism Ireland	.00	150.30	157.00
Commission for Taxi Regulation (Merged NTA 2011)	32.30	.00	.00
HEALTH GROUP	109,898.10	106,199.02	103,528.39
HEALTH	471.87	380.66	353.46
An Bord Altranais - The Nursing Board 1985	40.50	43.50	44.40
Blood Transfusion Service	552.78	543.24	533.30
Dental Council 2001	5.00	6.00	6.00
Food Safety Authority of Ireland	80.30	76.94	74.24
Food Safety Promotion Board	32.80	31.40	32.60
Health & Social Care Professionals Council 2007	5.00	11.08	16.90
Health Information and Quality Authority	151.70	148.70	155.10
Health Insurance Authority	8.58	8.58	8.58
Health Research Board	71.50	68.50	67.60
Irish Medicines Board	255.93	259.93	269.44
Medical Council	50.50	53.50	54.50
Mental Health Commission	38.85	34.85	34.25
National Cancer Registry Board	48.90	50.70	45.80
National Paediatric Hospital Development Board	2.50	1.50	1.50
National Treatment Purchase Fund	46.60	46.60	49.00
Opticians Board 1956	2.00	2.00	2.00
Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland 1875	23.75	23.55	23.75

FOREIGN AFFAIRS	1,521.85	1,442.70	1,418.60
Pre-Hospital Emergency Care Council	16.00	14.00	13.00
National Council - Prof Dev of Nursing and Midwifery (Retired 2012)	11.50	1.40	.00
National Social Work Qualifications Board (Retired 2011)	6.50	.00	.00
Office of Tobacco Control (Retired 2011)	2.80	.00	.00
Health Service Executive	107,972.24	104,392.39	101,742.97

Table 4

ENTERPRISE GROUP	2,981.94	2,821.52	2,686.40
JOBS, ENTERPRISE & INNOVATION	910.69	500.80	483.86
CRO & RFS	.00	112.94	104.61
LABOUR COURT	.00	27.20	23.93
LABOUR RELATIONS COMMISSION	.00	46.53	45.60
NERA	.00	102.36	102.43
ODCE	.00	38.70	34.10
City and County Enterprise Boards	130.10	129.90	124.30
Competition Authority	41.30	38.10	49.10
Enterprise Ireland	828.00	797.00	745.00
Forfás	109.50	106.50	88.50
Health and Safety Authority	185.10	177.20	173.40
IDA Ireland	264.00	249.00	245.00
InterTrade Ireland	43.30	47.11	40.10
Irish Auditing and Accounting Supervisory Authority	13.00	14.00	12.80
National Consumer Agency	45.40	41.40	38.40
National Standards Authority of Ireland	172.55	167.78	157.27

Questions - Written Answers

ENTERPRISE GROUP	2,981.94	2,821.52	2,686.40
Personal Injuries Assessment Board	74.00	69.00	69.00
Science Foundation Ireland	49.00	44.00	44.00
SFADCo Ltd (Industrial)	116.00	112.00	105.00
ARTS, HERITAGE AND THE GAEL-TACHT	1,363.89	1,750.41	1,711.00
ARTS, HERITAGE AND THE GAELTACHT	153.75	608.41	619.67
Arts Council	50.00	46.00	45.00
Boord o Ulster-Scotch (An Foras Teanga)	.00	16.54	15.54
Bord Scannan na hÉireann (Irish Film Board)	16.00	15.00	13.00
Chester Beatty Library	36.60	30.70	30.30
Crawford Gallery	14.00	13.00	13.00
Foras na Gaeilge (An Foras Teanga)	.00	60.00	63.00
Heritage Council	.00	14.80	15.00
Irish Museum of Modern Art	85.00	84.00	84.00
National Concert Hall	68.22	60.50	57.78
National Library of Ireland	96.40	106.17	86.87
National Museum of Ireland	171.50	162.59	154.25
Údarás na Gaeltachta	.00	92.08	83.48
Waterways Ireland	.00	343.12	325.81
Fáilte Ireland (2011 Transfer to TRAN)	344.02	.00	.00
Irish Sports Council (2011 Transfer to TRAN)	27.40	.00	.00
National Sports Campus Dev Authority (2011 Transfer to TRAN)	4.60	.00	.00

ENTERPRISE GROUP	2,981.94	2,821.52	2,686.40
SFADCo (Tourism) (2011 Transfer to TRAN)	23.50	.00	.00
Tourism Ireland (2011 Transfer to TRAN)	158.00	.00	.00
NATIONAL GALLERY	114.90	97.50	104.30
DEFENCE	10,666.82	10,478.64	9,998.31
ARMY PENSIONS	2.00	2.00	1.00
DEFENCE	352.22	345.74	339.61
Air Corps	767.00	792.00	757.00
Army	8,512.60	8,340.90	7,921.70
Naval Service	1,033.00	998.00	979.00

ENTERPRISE GROUP	2,981.94	2,821.52	2,686.40
SOCIAL PROTECTION	5,130.29	6,162.56	6,878.37
SOCIAL PROTECTION	5,008.49	6,036.16	6,751.97
Citizens Information Board	83.00	80.40	81.40
Pensions Board	38.80	46.00	45.00
PER GROUP	2,283.48	2,534.07	2,495.63
COMMISSION FOR PUBLIC SERVICE APPOINTMENTS	7.80	8.80	6.80
OFFICE OF PUBLIC WORKS	1,830.07	1,757.10	1,696.69
OMBUDSMAN	86.86	85.83	83.76
PRESIDENTS ESTABLISHMENT	21.83	21.10	23.40
PUBLIC APPOINTMENTS SERVICE	102.16	90.83	90.10
PUBLIC EXPENDITURE & REFORM	.00	276.61	317.53
Special EU Programmes Body	.00	64.00	64.00
STATE LABORATORY	88.90	85.40	82.15
VALUATION OFFICE	145.86	144.40	131.20

ENTERPRISE GROUP	2,981.94	2,821.52	2,686.40
CHILDREN AND YOUTH AFFAIRS	.00	241.31	474.54
CHILDREN AND YOUTH AFFAIRS	.00	100.16	130.89
Centres for Young Offenders	.00	.00	207.15
Family Support Agency	.00	12.00	12.00
National Education Welfare Board	.00	93.00	91.00
Office of the Ombudsman for Children	.00	11.00	10.00
The Adoption Authority	.00	25.15	23.50

The Total figure includes Civil Servants who work for the Oireachtas, which is directly funded by the Central Fund.

Public Sector Staff Issues

96. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation further to reports that the Chief Executive Office of the National Consumer Agency Ms Ann Fitzgerald was stepping down in October 2012 at the expiry of her contract, if he will confirm that Ms Fitzgerald no longer works for the NCA and to confirm if any termination payments were made to Ms Fitzgerald or if enhancements were made to future benefits payable to Ms Fitzgerald; and if so, if he will quantify such arrangements. [48794/12]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): Ms Fitzgerald advised the Board of the National Consumer Agency of her intention to step down as Chief Executive on the expiry of her contract on the 17th October 2012. Therefore, Ms Fitzgerald is no longer employed by the Agency. Issues in relation to the terms and conditions of Ms Fitzgerald's employment as Chief Executive are matters for the Agency.

County and City Enterprise Boards Grants

97. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the steps he is taking, to support small rural shops and businesses in counties Longford and Westmeath; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49019/12]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): Micro-enterprises employing less than 10 persons, in Counties Longford and Westmeath can, as their first port of call, contact their local County Enterprise Board (CEB) to discuss what options may be available to them in relation to their proposed business venture in the start-up and expansion stages. The CEBs also deliver non-financial supports such as one-to-one mentoring and a range of business advice and training programmes to improve management capability development

within micro-enterprises. These are designed to help new and existing enterprises to operate effectively and efficiently so as to last and grow, and are available, as appropriate, to the needs of a promoter's business. Contact details for the CEBs can be found on www.enterpriseboards.ie.

On 31 October 2012, my colleague, Mr John Perry TD, Minister for Small Business, launched the new Enterprise Ireland €200,000 Competitive Feasibility Fund aimed at stimulating start-ups and creating jobs and growth in the Midlands Region (Counties Laois, Longford, Westmeath, Laois and Offaly). This Fund, which can provide up to €25,000 per project, is now open for applications from entrepreneurs, and will remain open until Tuesday 20 November 2012.

In 2011, just over 3,700 people were employed on a full-time basis in Enterprise Ireland client companies in Counties Longford and Westmeath and some €4.3m was paid to companies in these counties for job creation/ retention and business development purposes. Contact details for Enterprise Ireland can be found at the Agency's website www.enterprise-ireland.com.

In order to improve access to credit for entrepreneurs and micro-enterprises, and to facilitate the growth and expansion of viable businesses from all industry sectors which have been refused access to credit by banks, the Government on 27 September 2012, established the Microfinance Loan Fund. The Fund has a significant entrepreneurship focus and is open to entrepreneurs and aspiring entrepreneurs of all ages, across the country.

Microfinance Ireland, (MFI), the company set up to operate the Fund, is working closely the CEBs and Enterprise Ireland and are very conscious of the particular difficulties entrepreneurs face with regard to credit history, previous business experience etc. and where they can assist entrepreneurs, they will do so. However, the potential viability of the business proposal is the dominant factor in any credit decision made by Microfinance Ireland.

The Action Plan for Jobs 2012 also includes a number of specific measures aimed at supporting employment in the retail sector. These Actions are for delivery across a number of Departments and agencies and include:

- a renewed focus on prompt payments to business,
- an assessment of the potential for future development of the retail sector,
- the introduction of a Statutory Code of Practice for Grocery Goods;
- the enactment of legislation to reform the statutory wage setting mechanisms; and
- the acceleration of the programme of revaluation of commercial premises, which will provide a basis for the adjustment in commercial rates.

Other initiatives which the Government introduced as part of the Jobs Initiative in May 2011 also continue to help support employment in the retail sector. These include the halving of Employer's PRSI on earnings up to €356 per week and the reduction in the 13.5% VAT rate to 9% on certain goods and services.

My officials and I meet with representatives of the retail sector to hear the challenges they face. These engagements will assist us in implementing the above commitments in the Action Plan for Jobs and in identifying any further actions that can be taken to support the sector.

Services for People with Disabilities

98. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will provide an update on the role of her Department and associated agencies in educating and creating awareness amongst employers regarding the needs of persons with Spina Bifida and persons with Hydrocephalus [48770/12]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): My Department has a primary role in delivering a wide range of disability-related supports, in relation to both income-support schemes and the range of employment services - provided previously by FÁS and now delivered through my Department – to support people with disabilities to avail of employment opportunities. These services are available to all persons with any form of disability. These latter services were brought together earlier this year under a new national identity - “EmployAbility Service” - which offers a range of supports to people with disabilities and also employers. These supports include, for employers, workplace adaptation grants and wage subsidies and for employees with a disability, on-site job coaches and mentors.

This service is key in supporting people with disabilities overcome the challenges of adapting to employment and being accepted in the workplace and in creating awareness among employers of the needs of employees with a disability.

School Meals Programme

99. **Deputy Jonathan O’Brien** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will provide in tabular form the number of schools accessing support through the school meals programme. [48882/12]

100. **Deputy Jonathan O’Brien** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will provide in tabular form the number of children receiving their school meals through the school meals programme. [48883/12]

101. **Deputy Jonathan O’Brien** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will provide in tabular form the schools that have successfully applied for inclusion under the school meals’ programme; and the number of schools that were refused inclusion in the school meals’ programme. [48884/12]

102. **Deputy Jonathan O’Brien** asked the Minister for Social Protection the annual Departmental spend on the 2011/2012 school meals programme. [48885/12]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 99 to 102, inclusive, together.

The school meals programme provides funding towards the provision of food services for disadvantaged children through two schemes. The first is the statutory urban school meals scheme, operated by local authorities and part-financed by the Department of Social Protection. The second is the school meals local projects schemes through which funding is provided directly to participating schools and local and voluntary community groups who run their own school meals projects. The Government has provided €35 million for the school meals programme in 2012.

As the budget allocation for the school meals programme has not increased in recent years, new applications for inclusion in the scheme are retained on file by my Department and are considered for inclusion as additional funding become available through schools opting out of the programme. Priority for funding is given to schools which are part of the Department of Education and Skill’s initiative for disadvantaged schools, ‘Delivering Equality of Opportunity

in Schools' (DEIS). All DEIS schools who applied to join the scheme in the previous school year have been invited to participate in the 2012-2013 school meals programme. Over 40 additional DEIS schools have joined the scheme during the past four years.

Information on the numbers of children and schools-groups accessing support through the school meals programme is set out in the following tabular statement.

School Meals Programme

Year 2011/12	Number of Schools	Number of Children	Expenditure 2011
Urban School Meals Scheme	332	49,317	€0.89m
School Meals Local Project Scheme	1014	139,743	€34.08m
Total	1346	189,060	€34.97m

Social Welfare Appeals Status

103. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Social Protection the position regarding an appeal in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48765/12]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on 15th March 2012. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant Departmental papers and comments by or on behalf of the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought. These papers were received in the Social Welfare Appeals Office on the 11th May 2012 and the case has been referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions on social welfare entitlements.

Question No. 104 withdrawn.

Social Welfare Appeals Delays

105. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Social Protection her plans to reduce the processing times for social welfare appeals; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48792/12]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I am advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that the current average times taken to process appeals decided by summary decision is 27.5 weeks and 39.8 weeks for those requiring an oral hearing. Generally the vast majority of cases fall within these average times but extenuating factors, often outside of the control of the Social Welfare Appeals Office, will cause greater delays in some cases.

From about early 2009 the number of appeals received by the Social Welfare Appeals Office has increased dramatically and by 2011 had more than doubled from an average of 15,000 per year to 31,241 in 2011. A further 29,630 have been received for the period January to October this year. These increases have significantly impacted on the time taken to process appeals.

In an effort to reduce the processing times for all appeals, the Department has appointed 15 additional Appeals Officers since 2010. In addition, a further 10 Appeals Officers, formerly employed by the Community Welfare Services (CWS) of the Health Services Executive joined the Office as part of the integration of the CWS appeals services into the Social Welfare Appeals Office, bringing the total number of Appeals Officers now serving in the Office to 41. In addition to this the Office has improved its business processes and IT support.

I am assured by the Chief Appeals Officer that she is keeping the methods of operation by which the Social Welfare Appeals Office conducts its business under constant review, and that the processes are continuously being enhanced to reduce the backlogs in the Office and, overall, to reduce the processing times for dealing with appeals.

Invalidity Pension Applications

106. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Social Protection the position regarding a disability pension claim in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath; when payment will issue; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48811/12]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Invalidity pension is a payment for people who are permanently incapable of work because of illness or incapacity and who satisfy the contribution conditions.

This Department received a claim for invalidity pension for the person concerned on 24 May 2011. The medical evidence provided by the claimant in support of his claim was examined by a medical assessor who was of the opinion that the person concerned is not eligible for invalidity pension as he does not satisfy the medical criteria. The application for invalidity pension was, accordingly, disallowed by a deciding officer. The applicant was notified of this decision and the reason for it on 27 July 2012.

The person concerned subsequently submitted further medical evidence in support of his claim. This evidence has been forwarded to a different medical assessor for evaluation. On receipt, a deciding officer will review the application and the person concerned will be notified of the outcome.

Carer's Allowance Delays

107. **Deputy John Halligan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason behind the decision to allocate further staff resources to new applications for carer's allowance in an effort reduce processing times while old applications, that is, those received prior to a certain date are still being subjected to delays, some of which have already been waiting over a year for a decision; her vies on whether it would have been more prudent to allocate the extra staff to clear the backlog while still dealing with newer applications at a speedier pace; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48842/12]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I acknowledge that the time taken to process carer's allowance claims at present is not satisfactory but I am satisfied that the Department is taking appropriate action to resolve the situation.

Carer's allowance section has recently completed a major service delivery modernisation project to improve the efficiency with which it processes applications from clients for carer's allowance. The project involved the development of IT functionality and associated business

process re-organisation. Full deployment of the new system for Carer's Allowance was completed in June 2012.

Following the completion of the modernisation project, an in-depth business process improvement (BPI) project was completed for the carer's allowance scheme. This project focused on optimising output and customer service and the reduction of backlogs. The first step in the elimination of the backlog is to ensure that there is sufficient capacity to deal with new work as it arrives. The outcome of the review is the division of work into two streams. One concentrates on dealing with new claim intake and processes these without delay and the other on the backlog which is ring-fenced with a clear and targeted plan for its elimination. Additional resources have been added to the backlog clearance team. Implementation of the plan commenced on Monday 3 September and will be closely monitored and managed to ensure it achieves its objectives. A noted increase in the number of claims processed was achieved in September and October, where claims processed substantially exceeded claim intake, and this increase continues into November. However, it will take a number of months before the backlog is reduced to an acceptable level. The allocation of available resources to this task continues to be monitored.

Question No. 108 withdrawn.

Disability Allowance Appeals

109. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the position regarding a disability allowance appeal in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48868/12]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on 24th August 2012. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant departmental papers and comments by the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought. When received, the case in question will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions on social welfare entitlements.

Social Welfare Overpayments

110. **Deputy Seán Kenny** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will provide a detailed breakdown of the way her Department came to the conclusion that an overpayment of over €15,000 was paid to a person (details supplied) in Dublin 13. [48869/12]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Evidence became available to the Department to indicate that the person in question was not providing full time care and attention for the caree. Following an investigation of the evidence and all the circumstances, it was decided that the person in question was not entitled to carer's allowance for the period between 3rd September 2009 and 7th December 2011. This decision creates an overpayment of €15,792.50. This sum is recoverable by the Department. The person in question was notified of this decision on 16th January 2012.

The table outlines a breakdown of this overpayment.

Social Welfare Scheme	Date from	Date to	Payment received	Weekly overpayment	Number of Weeks	Total Overpayment
Carer's Allowance	03/09/2009	06/01/2010	€110.25	€110.25	18	€1,984.50
Carer's Allowance	07/01/2010	05/01/2011	€106.00	€106.00	52	€5,512.00
Carer's Allowance	06/01/2011	07/12/2011	€102.00	€102.00	48	€4,896.00
Respite Care Grant	03/06/2010	09/06/2010	€1,700.00	€1,700.00	1	€1,700.00
Respite Care Grant	02/06/2011	08/06/2011	€1,700.00	€1,700.00	1	€1,700.00
-	-	-	-	-	-	€15,792.00

Question No. 111 withdrawn.

Carer's Allowance Applications

112. **Deputy Tom Hayes** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a decision on a carer's allowance claim will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Tipperary; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48910/12]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): This application for carer's allowance was awarded on 1st November 2012. A letter with all details of entitlement and payment has issued to the person in question.

Carer's Allowance Appeals

113. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will receive a decision on an appeal for carer's allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48911/12]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on 11th September 2012. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant departmental papers and comments by the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought. When received, the case in question will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions on social welfare entitlements.

Disability Allowance Appeals

114. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a decision will be

made on an appeal date given for disability payment in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare who is unable to seek employment due to her health condition; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48918/12]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on 10th May 2012. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant Departmental papers and comments by or on behalf of the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought. These papers were received in the Social Welfare Appeals Office on the 4th October 2012 and the case will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions on social welfare entitlements.

Jobseeker's Allowance Appeals

115. **Deputy Paul J. Connaughton** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a decision will issue on a jobseekers allowance appeal in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Galway; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48988/12]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on 12th July 2012. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant Departmental papers and comments by or on behalf of the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought. These papers were received in the Social Welfare Appeals Office on 26th July 2012 and the case has been referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions on social welfare entitlements.

Rent Supplement Scheme Applications

116. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will arrange to have a rent allowance restored to a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48991/12]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The person concerned is now in receipt of their full entitlement to rent allowance based on their household circumstances. Arrangements are being made to pay arrears due as soon as possible.

Social Welfare Code Issues

117. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Social Protection if there has been any change in the way that the universal social charge or any other taxes or levies are assessed by her Department for the purposes of means assessment for any of her Department's allowance based payments in the past 12 months; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49001/12]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): There have been no changes to the treatment of the universal social charge (USC) for means testing purposes for social assistance payments over the past 12 months.

The earnings assessed for social assistance means testing purposes generally is based on earnings net of PRSI contributions, superannuation/PRSA contributions and trade union subscriptions. No account is taken in the calculation of any income tax or USC payable on earnings.

The one exception to this arrangement relates to entitlement to Family Income Supplement. This has been, for many years, assessed net of all statutory charges including income tax. This approach has been continued following the introduction of the universal social charge. Family Income Supplement is assessed on the basis of net income after deduction of all statutory charges including the universal social charge, income tax and PRSI.

The programme for government contained a commitment to review the universal social charge. It was announced in Budget 2012 that, following this review, the exemption level was being raised from €4,004 to €10,036 per annum and this came into effect from the beginning of January last. It was estimated, at the time, that this measure would benefit nearly 330,000 people (including part-time workers in receipt of primary weekly welfare payments).

Carer's Allowance Applications

118. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she is satisfied with the reasons an application for carer's allowance in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Donegal has been refused; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49006/12]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I confirm that the department received an application for carer's allowance from the person in question on the 16th November 2011. This application was referred to one of the Department's medical assessors who found that the care recipient was not medically eligible for carer's allowance. A letter issued on the 19th July 2012 refusing the allowance. The person in question subsequently submitted further medical evidence for review on 13th September 2012. This medical evidence is awaiting medical assessment by a medical assessor. On completion of all the necessary investigations as part of this review, a decision will be made and the person in question will be contacted directly with the outcome.

Carer's Allowance Applications

119. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she is satisfied with the reasons an application for carer's allowance in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Donegal has been refused; and if she will make a statement on the matter.

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I confirm that the department received an application for carer's allowance from the person in question on the 16th November 2011. This application was referred to one of the Department's medical assessors who found that the care recipient was not medically eligible for carer's allowance. A letter issued on the 19th July 2012 refusing the allowance. The person in question subsequently submitted further medical evidence for review on 13th September 2012. This medical evidence is awaiting medical assessment by a medical assessor. On completion of all the necessary investigations as part of this review, a decision will be made and the person in question will be contacted directly with the outcome.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Appeals

120. **Deputy John Browne** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a review of entitlement to domiciliary care allowance will be decided in respect of a person's (details supplied) in County Wexford [49044/12]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on 28th September 2012. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant Departmental papers and comments by the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought. When received, the case in question will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions on social welfare entitlements.

National Cultural Institutions

121. **Deputy Anne Ferris** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if he will address concerns regarding the arms length principle and the proposed dissolution of the independent boards of the National Library and National Museum; if he will provide an estimated breakdown of the cost-benefit analysis on each of the recently announced reform proposals for the 12 organisations under his aegis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49014/12]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan): The Deputy will be aware that, as part of a range of reforms recently agreed by Government under the Public Service Reform Plan, it was decided that the existing National Archives of Ireland (NAI) governance model will be applied to the National Library of Ireland (NLI) and the National Museum of Ireland (NMI). The National Archives Advisory Council will be retained, with a reduced membership operating *pro bono*. A single statutory NLI and NMI Advisory Council will operate *pro bono* in place of the existing boards. Board membership will be reduced overall by some 60%. It is anticipated that this model will achieve significant savings and increase efficiencies across the institutions. The NAI will continue to operate, as currently, with a statutorily independent Director, within the ambit of my Department, and a similar model will be put in place for the Directors of the NLI and NMI. A robust shared services model will be deployed - through my Department in relation to corporate support services and by formal inter-institutional agreement in relation to operational services.

In light of the foregoing in relation to ensuring statutory independence for the Directors of the institutions, I do not consider that any issue arises in relation an 'arms length principle' as suggested by the Deputy.

The Deputy should note that savings of €20 million in enhanced service efficiencies and value-for-money were targeted in the Public Service Reform Plan. In this context, it is expected that savings in the region of approximately €1m will be made initially across the institutions involved in the reform programme which are funded from my Department's Vote Group, with further savings to be identified as the various cost saving measures are implemented.

Energy Schemes

122. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the progress that has been made towards our renewable targets for transport and the amount of oil consumption that has been displaced as a percentage of the total domestic transport energy market over the past few years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48774/12]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): The Mineral Oil Tax Relief (MOTR) schemes, which were introduced in 2005 and 2006 and ran until 2010, and the Biofuel Obligation Scheme were measures introduced to incentivise the use of biofuels in Ireland.

The Biofuel Obligation Scheme was introduced in July 2010 to underpin delivery of the mandatory EU target of 10% renewable energy in transport by 2020. The obligation currently requires that the amount of biofuel brought to the market is not less than 4.166% of the relevant disposal of petroleum road transport fuels. In 2011, the total amount of petroleum motor fuel placed on the market was 4,276 million litres of which 145 million litres or 3.39% were biofuel, which equated to 2.7% of the total energy requirement in road transport and which displaced approximately 115 million litres of petroleum fuels. Taking into account the double certificates issued for biofuel produced from wastes a total of 194 million biofuel certificates were issued in 2011 which equates to 4.54% of relevant disposals during the year. The Biofuel Obligation will increase over time (with the first increase happening in 2013) requiring suppliers of road transport fuels to make certain that even higher volumes sold are biofuel.

Prior to the commencement of the MOTR schemes and the Biofuel Obligation Scheme, market penetration of biofuels in Ireland was almost non-existent but since their introduction the energy supplied by biofuels in road transport has risen steadily each year from less than 0.1% in 2006 to 2.7% in 2011.

EU Directives

123. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the percentage in every case of electricity generated from oil, coal and from natural gas in this jurisdiction and quantify the extent, where applicable to which each fuel is domestically sourced or is imported and the quantity and cost of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48775/12]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): Under Regulation 25 of S.I. No. 60 of 2005, which transposed Article 3(6) of the Electricity Directive (2003/54/EC), the Commission for Energy Regulation (CER) is required to ensure that all electricity suppliers provide reliable information on bills and promotional materials sent to customers regarding the contribution of each energy source to the overall fuel mix of the supplier concerned.

The latest CER figures (2010), on an all-island basis, show the following fuel mix for electricity generation; Gas 64%, Coal 16%, Renewables 12%, Peat 6% and Oil 2%. I have been informed by the CER that the 2011 fuel mix figures will be published shortly.

The sourcing, cost and quantity of the raw materials used for electricity generation is a commercial decision by each company. However, I can confirm that Coal, Oil and the majority of the gas are sourced internationally while renewables and peat are sourced domestically.

Mobile Telephony

124. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources further to his statement on 30 May 2012 welcoming the formal decision on that date by the EU Competitiveness Council regarding data roaming costs, if he will update Dáil Éireann on the implementation to date of that decision; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48904/12]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): Following the Council decision referred to in the question, “EU Regulation 531/2012 of 13 June 2012 on roaming on public mobile communications networks” was published in the Official Journal of the European Union on the 30 June last and became directly applicable to mobile roaming services providers on the following day. The purpose of the Regulation is to provide increased levels of consumer protection for customers using mobile phone roaming services. The Regulation requires recurring reductions in the maximum permitted roaming charges over time out to 2014, imposes obligations on service providers to circulate better consumer information to customers including early warnings if the aggregate bill for roaming is rising above €50 in any month and to implement structural changes to permit increased competition in the provision of roaming services.

This is the third in a series of EU Regulations to increase the level of consumer protection for mobile phone users when using roaming services. The Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg) was designated as the National Regulatory Authority (NRA) in Ireland for the purpose of the previous Regulations (EC) No 717/2007, as amended by (EC) No 544/2009. My Department is currently drafting regulations to designate ComReg as the NRA in Ireland for the purposes of the current Regulation.

At the end of July last ComReg published a document [12/83] “Implementation of EU Roaming Regulation by Irish Mobile Companies - 9th wave of Irish and EU aggregated data” which, among other things, sets out the main obligations arising for roaming service providers under the most recent EU Regulation.

Broadband Services Provision

125. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will provide an update on the implementation of the Next Generation Broadband Programme to-date; if he will outline his plans for enhancing broadband coverage in rural areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48905/12]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): The Government’s National Broadband Plan, which I published recently, aims to radically change the broadband landscape in Ireland by ensuring that high speed services of at least 30Mbps are available to all of our citizens and businesses, well in advance of the EU’s target date of 2020, and that significantly higher speeds are available to as many homes and businesses as possible.

The Plan commits to high speed broadband availability across the country – specifically:

- 70Mbps – 100Mbps will be available from the commercial market operators to more than half of the population by 2015;
- At least 40Mbps, and in many cases faster speeds, to at least a further 20% (and potentially

as much as 35%) of the population during the lifetime of the Government; and

- A minimum of 30Mbps for every remaining home and business in the country, also during the lifetime of the Government.

During the preparation of the Plan, the commercial market operators indicated that they expect to provide 70Mbps to 100Mbps services to 50% of the population by 2015. The areas to be provided with those services will be determined by the commercial market operators.

One of the first steps in delivering on the 30Mbps and 40Mbps commitments will be the completion of a formal national mapping exercise to determine the exact position in relation to commercial service providers' existing and planned broadband services throughout the country. Preparatory work has commenced within my Department to expedite this mapping exercise.

The mapping exercise will identify the areas of the country where there is market failure in the provision of high speed broadband services. It will also identify where the market is expected to succeed and fail in the delivery of high speed broadband over the coming years. The precise areas of the country which will require State intervention will not be identified until that process is completed. I would reiterate however, that the Government is committed to the delivery of the speeds referred to above, to ensure that all parts of Ireland will have at least 30Mbps connectivity.

Mobile Telephony

126. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will comment with reference to Article 14 (4) and Article 5 (5) of the European Parliament resolution on roaming on public mobile communications networks within the Union, May 2012, on Ofcom's assertion in its Communications Market Report 2012 that 91% of Northern Ireland mobile phone users have picked up Republic of Ireland networks when in Northern Ireland; if he will outline his strategy for addressing inadvertent roaming charges on Republic of Ireland mobile phone users for phone usage in this State; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48916/12]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): Inadvertent roaming within the EU is governed by "EU Regulation 531/2012 of 13 June 2012 on roaming on public mobile communications networks". This is the third in a series of EU Regulations to increase the level of consumer protection for mobile phone users when using roaming services.

The current Regulation, (EU) 531/2012, was published in the Official Journal of the European Union on the 30 June last and became directly applicable to mobile roaming services providers on the following day. My Department is currently drafting regulations to designate the Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg) as the National Regulatory Authority (NRA) in Ireland for the purposes of the current Regulation.

ComReg was also designated as the NRA in Ireland for the purpose of the previous Regulations. Last July ComReg published a document [12/83] "Implementation of EU Roaming Regulation by Irish Mobile Companies - 9th wave of Irish and EU aggregated data" which, among other things, sets out the main obligations arising for roaming service providers under the most recent EU Regulation, it includes provisions such as roaming providers making information available on how to avoid inadvertent roaming and taking reasonable steps to protect their consumers from paying roaming charges while situated in their Member State. ComReg is gathering information from providers regarding the measures that they are taking and the

information they are providing to their customers in this regard.

The current Regulation also requires that customers receive a short text message (SMS) informing them on each occasion when they move to a roaming service and the related details. In addition, ComReg advises customers to refer to their handset user guide to change the setting from 'automatic network selection' to 'manual network selection' to avoid inadvertent roaming. Customers can refer the matter to ComReg's consumer line, if they have raised the issue with their provider and not achieved a satisfactory outcome. I understand from ComReg that the level of issues raised by Irish consumers in this respect is low.

Regulation of the telephone market in Northern Ireland is a matter for its regulatory authorities.

Electoral Divisions Establishment

127. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the steps that he is taking to establish the Electoral Commission to increase voter registration and to improve electoral integrity; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49017/12]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): The Programme for Government includes a range of political reform measures a number of which are in my area of responsibility as Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government. Many of the measures have already been implemented through legislation enacted in 2011 to provide for a reduction in the number of TDs, reduced spending limits at Presidential elections and time limits for the holding of bye elections, and legislation enacted in 2012 to strengthen the political funding regime in Ireland. That legislation also provides for the payment of state funding to political parties being conditional on parties having at least 30% women and 30% men candidates at the next general election. The Electoral (Amendment) (Dáil Constituencies) Bill 2012 was published on 5 October 2012 and will soon come before the Oireachtas for debate. The Government legislation programme includes an Electoral (Amendment) (Referendum Spending and Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill to be published in 2013 which will implement more commitments in the Programme for Government. Arising from the Action Programme for Effective Local Government I will shortly establish and provide support to a Local Electoral Area Boundary Committee to review and make recommendations on local electoral area boundaries in time for the 2014 local elections.

Following these tasks, I will be addressing the Programme for Government commitment to establish an Electoral Commission to subsume functions of existing bodies and my Department. Establishment of an Electoral Commission will be a major body of work. Issues for consideration include international best practice, the Commission's structure and functions, who it reports to, its relationship with other bodies currently involved in electoral administration, and the approach to be followed in relation to the extensive legislation that will be required, as well as practical matters including staffing and funding arrangements.

Consultancy Contracts Issues

128. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide details in tabular form for the years 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012 inclusive, of the arrangements entered into by the Local Government Management Service Board, for the obtaining of advice from a senior or junior counsel and or a firm of solici-

tors; the subject matter for which advice was sought; the names of the barristers' and solicitors' firms concerned and the fees paid; the nature of the work concerned; if in each case the matter was advertised for competitive tender; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48800/12]

129. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide in tabular form a list of all companies or persons providing an external professional service to the Local Government Management Services Board for the years 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012 inclusive, such as ICT, legal advice, advertising, project management and including any other external professional service not listed; the amount invoiced by each company; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48801/12]

130. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide details in tabular form for the years 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012 inclusive the total amount of expenditure on consultancy by the Local Government Management Services Board; the names of the consultancy companies awarded contracts; the nature of the work concerned; the fees paid to each consultant; if the matter was advertised for competitive tender; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48802/12]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 128 to 130, inclusive, together.

The information sought is not readily available in my Department. Its compilation by the Local Government Management Agency, established in August 2012 and nationalising the functions of the Local Government Management Services and Computer Services Boards, would involve a disproportionate amount of time and work.

Departmental Bodies

131. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the role and function of the Finance and Audit Committee of the Local Government Management Agency; the persons who are members of the Finance and Audit Committee of the Local Government Management Agency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48803/12]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): The role of the Finance and Audit Committee, as part of the on-going systematic review and development of the control environment and governance procedures within the Local Government Management Agency (LGMA), is to promote good accounting practice, better and more informed decision-making and continued focus on regularity, propriety and value for money throughout the LGMA.

The Committee also has a role in overseeing and advising on matters relating to the operation and development of the internal audit function, and to report to the Accounting Officer in relation to the operation and development of that function.

The Committee is not responsible for any executive functions and has no executive powers but exercises an advisory role in relation to its duties and functions.

The functions of the Finance and Audit Committee of the LGMA are as follows:

- To act as a source of independent advice on matters relating to financial management and control

- To oversee the internal audit function
- To assess whether appropriate action is taken to deal with key issues identified by the Internal Audit Unit and by external audit
- To examine and monitor the implementation of the LGMA's risk management strategy
- To review and advise on the programme of work for the Internal Audit Unit
- To facilitate improvements in internal audit and internal control
- To approve and periodically review a charter for Internal Audit which clearly defines the purpose, authority, role, responsibility and reporting relationships with the Audit Committee, Internal Audit Unit and relevant management of the LGMA
- To assess the results of completed internal audit reports and advise the Chief Executive, the Accounting Officer and the members of the LGMA Board of its conclusions thereon
- To monitor the implementation of the audit plan
- To request special reports from internal audit as considered appropriate
- To foster the development of best practice within the Internal Audit Unit

The membership of the Finance and Audit Committee is as follows:

- Mr. Eddie Breen – Wexford County Manager
- Mr. Hubert Kearns – Sligo County Manager
- Mr. John Tierney – Dublin City Manager
- Mr. E die Sheehy – Wicklow County Manager

Local Government Management Agency Remit

132. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the newly established Local Government Management Agency claims that it will be a national centre of excellence providing, procuring and coordinating a range of service supports, required in the local government sector; the person who is the Chairperson of the Local Government Management Agency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48804/12]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): The Local Government Management Agency (LGMA) was established in August 2012 under the Local Government (Corporate Bodies) Acts 1971 to 2012.

The Agency rationalises the functions of the Local Government Management Services Board and the Local Government Computer Services Board in line with the Public Service Reform Plan published by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in November 2011.

The LGMA was established to provide centralised and shared services on behalf of local authorities, particularly in ICT and Industrial Relations / Human Resource Management.

As part of my Department's Agency rationalisation programme, the LGMA will take on the core residual functions of An Chomhairle Leabharlanna, which has been dissolved as of 1

November 2012.

The joint Chairperson of the Local Government Management Services Board and the Local Government Computer Services Board was Mr. Eddie Breen, Wexford County Manager, who will continue as Chairperson of the Local Government Management Agency.

Local Authority Staff Issues

133. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the number of permanent and temporary staff employed by Kilkenny Borough Council in 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011 and to date in 2012; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48805/12]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): The number of persons employed in Kilkenny County Council in 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012 to date is set out in a table on a whole time equivalent basis (WTE).

Kilkenny County Council	Permanent WTE	Temporary WTE	Total
December 2008	564.50	51.17	615.67
December 2009	550.55	17.49	568.04
December 2010	532.75	12.49	545.24
December 2011	523.49	5.6	529.09
September 2012	501.4	6.6	508.00

Staff numbers for Kilkenny Borough Council are included in the overall staffing numbers for the County Council and are not collected separately.

Legislative Programme

134. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his views on the point made regarding the urgent need for climate change legislation in correspondence (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48806/12]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): I refer to the reply to Question 700 of 6 November 2012.

Anti-Social Behaviour

135. **Deputy John Halligan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 427 of 23 October 2012, in view of increasing levels of anti-social behaviour being reported here at the moment, the number of warrants issued and evictions being sought noted in his response seems to be very low; if he will clarify the number of the noted complaints and evictions recorded for 2010 and 2011 that related to Waterford city and county councils respectively; if he will further clarify the number of anti social behaviour officers employed in city and county councils across the State; the number of staff allocated to these antisocial behaviour departments within local authorities and the cost to the relevant local authority. [48841/12]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): Statistics compiled by my Department show that one warrant under section 62 of the Housing Act 1966 was sought by Waterford City Council in each of 2010 and 2011, with no resultant evictions. No warrants were sought by Waterford County Council during that period. As stated in the reply to Question No. 427 of 23 October 2012, my Department does not collect statistics on the number of complaints received by local authorities.

The Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1997 (as amended) and section 35 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 confer a range of powers on housing authorities relating to combating anti-social behaviour in their housing stock. Authorities are required by the 2009 Act to adopt an anti-social behaviour strategy. The exercise of these powers, including the allocation of staff to deal with this issue, is a matter for the relevant authority.

Homelessness Strategy

136. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the number of homeless persons in Dublin city and nationally; the plans and budgets in place to resolve this issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48844/12]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The extent of homelessness in the Dublin region, where numbers are most pronounced, was reviewed and updated using the now fully operational Pathway Accommodation & Support System (PASS) and crosschecked against each of the Dublin local authorities’ housing management data systems to give an accurate figure of the known homeless population in Dublin. Following extensive cross checking and quality control to remove duplications and ensure accuracy of all data entries, the confirmed extent of homelessness in the Dublin region as at September 2011 was 1,891 persons. PASS, which commenced operation in the Dublin region in 2011, is being extended nationally on a phased basis with work currently underway in other regions. The PASS system will in future provide good quality, timely, data on homelessness nationally as an evidence base for all homelessness services.

The Housing Agency’s Housing Needs Assessment 2008 and 2011 reports break down the categories of housing need, including in respect of homelessness, for all 88 housing authorities nationwide. These are available on my Department’s website at www.environ.ie.

This statutory assessment of housing need, carried out every three years by all housing authorities, only counts homeless persons where an application has been made to a housing authority.

On 6 September 2012, the CSO published its special Census report, Homeless Persons in Ireland and it indicated that 3,808 persons were either sleeping rough or in accommodation designated for the homeless on the night of 10 April 2011. The rough sleeper count was 64, with 59 of those people located in Dublin. It is not tolerable that anyone should sleep on the streets but it is important that the homeless figures released are not confused with the number of people sleeping rough. The vast majority of people classified in the CSO’s report as homeless are in long-term or emergency accommodation.

Government policy envisages a move away from the traditional bed and breakfast accommodation with the emphasis on housing authorities adopting a housing led approach. This will reduce the amount of time spent in homeless services, in particular bed and breakfast accommodation, eliminate the need to sleep rough and place prevention at the forefront of the delivery of services.

I intend to issue a policy statement on homelessness shortly. That statement will take account of demands on existing housing and will assess how best to continue providing services in a manner consistent with the elimination of existing homelessness and to ensure more effective prevention strategies. I will be indicating what I expect from housing authorities and other stakeholders in accelerating progress towards realising the ambition of eliminating involuntary long-term homelessness.

My Department's current funding provision for the running costs of homeless accommodation and related services for 2012 is €50 million, which, together with 10% provided from housing authorities' own resources, brings the total available funding to €55.55 million in 2012. This level of funding means that there will be no reduction in the provision of essential frontline support services.

Non-Principal Private Residence Charge Collection

137. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the position regarding the non-principal private residence charge in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48887/12]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): The Local Government (Charges) Act 2009, as amended, broadened the revenue base of local authorities through the introduction of the Non Principal Private Residence Charge. The Charge is set at €200 and is being levied and collected by local authorities. It is payable by the owners of private rented accommodation, holiday homes, self-catering accommodation and other non-principal private residences.

Section 2(2)(d) of the 2009 Act, as amended, provides that a building in respect of which local authority rates are payable and that is wholly used as a dwelling is not a residential property for the purposes of the Act and is not liable for the Charge. Notwithstanding section 2(2) (d), I urge all owners who are unsure of liability for the Charge to contact their local authority to determine liability.

Building Regulations Amendments

138. **Deputy Paschal Donohoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide an update in respect of the Building Control (Amendment) Regulations 2012; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48917/12]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): Following an extensive public consultation process undertaken earlier this year, I am now in the process of finalising the Building Control (Amendment) Regulations 2012 for signature into law. The new regulations will provide, among other things, for the introduction of mandatory certificates of compliance by builders and designers of buildings confirming that the statutory requirements of the Building Regulations have been met in relation to the building concerned. Drawings and particulars demonstrating compliance must also be submitted to the local building control authority. In addition a building owner will be required to assign a registered professional to inspect the work during construction and also to certify that the completed building is in compliance with the requirements of the Building Regulations. I believe that the measures outlined above are key steps necessary to strengthen the building control system and will be capable of delivering a stronger level of compliance with the requirements of the Build-

ing Regulations and a better quality of homes and buildings.

Public Service Contracts

139. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if it is possible for local authorities to include local employment clauses in public contracts before they are put out to tender; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48983/12]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): Issues concerning compliance with procurement legislation and guidance are a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform. The procurement of products or services by a local authority is a matter for the authority concerned. Notwithstanding this, guidelines by the National Public Procurement Policy Unit (NPPPU) of the Department Public Expenditure and Reform apply to all public sector bodies, including local authorities.

I am advised that the rules on awarding public contracts have provisions which allow the specification of social criteria, such as the requirement for employment of long term unemployed, as a condition in the performance of the contract. Any such provisions must be compatible with EU law, i.e. they must be made known to all interested parties and must not restrict participation by contractors from other Member States. Subject to this, contracting authorities have the discretion to apply such conditions, as appropriate.

Under the EU Directives on public procurement, public works, supplies and service contracts above certain thresholds must be advertised in the Official Journal of the EU and awarded on the basis of objective and non-restrictive criteria. For contracts below these thresholds, the general requirement is that they be advertised on the national public procurement website www.etenders.gov.ie or, depending on value, awarded on the basis of a competitive process of direct invitation to an adequate number of suitable suppliers.

The aim of the rules is to promote an open, competitive and non-discriminatory public procurement regime which delivers best value for money. It would be a breach of the rules for a public body to favour or discriminate against particular candidates on grounds of nationality and where the EU Directives apply there are legal remedies which may be used against any public body infringing these rules.

The local government sector avails of a number of shared procurement mechanisms already in place (nationally – National Procurement Service (NPS) frameworks, LA Quotes/Bitumen, and regionally – library service procurement, public lighting maintenance, debt collection, paid parking, etc.), and local authorities will support and operate under Mandatory Frameworks for procurement as they are developed.

A new procurement governance structure is currently being put in place in the local government sector comprising a lead procurement local authority (Kerry County Council), specialist procurement support units and regional procurement co-ordinators. In addition, each county and city council has a designated Procurement Officer in place.

Government initiatives in relation to procurement are reshaping the way the State and business engages in relation to acquisition of goods and services. Sensitivity regarding Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) is needed to maximise local buy-in particularly with regard to pre-qualification criteria required in order to meet eligibility thresholds when tendering for public contracts. In this regard, while local authorities provide a measure of support for SMEs in engaging with procurement processes (e.g. the LA Quotes website) they will work with the Na-

tional Procurement Service as they further develop and disseminate guidance in order to assist SMEs in tendering for public contracts, and assist local authorities doing a similar job locally.

As part of the implementation of the local government sectoral strategy to promote employment and support local enterprise, Supporting Economic Recovery and Jobs – Locally, local authorities will also work as necessary with the responsible State agencies in the development of the Procuring Innovation initiative (Action 3.53 of the Action Plan for Jobs) to increase the purchasing of innovative solutions from SMEs by encouraging a more flexible approach to tendering that focuses on procuring solutions to specific needs, rather than specific products or services. In view of the importance of improving the capacity of SMEs to compete under the framework agreement approach, local authorities will also work with Enterprise Ireland to ensure that pre-qualifying criteria for the award of public contracts that are subject to frameworks will be proportionate to the relative value of the contract, so that pre-qualification is not unnecessarily weighted against SMEs.

While public procurement policy addresses the inclusion of social clauses in public contracts, the application of such clauses in public contracts is a matter for each contracting authority concerned.

Housing Issues

140. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the position regarding a housing situation (details supplied) [48998/12]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The circumstances referred to relate to a private transaction in which my Department has no remit.

Property Registration Authority

141. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the total number of staff employed by the Property Registration Authority at each of its offices; if the property is leased, and if so when the lease expires; the maximum staffing capacity of leased properties; the future plans if any for each property; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48874/12]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The Property Registration Authority, PRA, was established on 4 November 2006 under the provisions of the Registration of Deeds and Title Act 2006 and is responsible for managing and controlling the Registry of Deeds and the Land Registry. The Registry of Deeds is located in the Registry of Deeds Building, Kings Inns, Henrietta Street, Dublin 1 and the number of staff located there is 28.

The Land Registry offices of the Property Registration Authority are based in three locations in Dublin and in decentralised offices in both Waterford and Roscommon. All of these locations with the exception of the Setanta Centre, Nassau Street, Dublin 2, (which is leased) are owned by the Office of Public Works, OPW.

Land Registry- Dublin offices

1. 84 PRA staff are currently located in the Setanta Centre, Nassau Street. The property is leased by the Office of Public Works, OPW, at a cost of €996,164 per annum. The lease for this accommodation expires in March 2013 and staff will have to be re-located before the expiry of the lease. The PRA has been in continuing discussions with the OPW to finalise the proposed

re-location of staff. The OPW are now looking at a potentially suitable location but it is considered likely that this location will not be sufficient to accommodate all the staff currently located in the Setanta Centre and some staff will have to be re-located to the Chancery Street offices.

2. The number of PRA staff currently located in the Four Courts complex in Chancery Street, Dublin 7 is 202.

3. A further 18 staff are located in the PRA's central filing repository in Shanowen Road in Santry.

Land Registry-Decentralised offices

1. The number of PRA staff located in the Waterford building is 185.

2. The number of PRA staff located in the Roscommon building is 77.

Following the Government Review on the viability of all decentralisation projects, it was decided, in the case of the Property Registration Authority, that the Authority should remain in situ in the new premises located at the Golf Links Road, Roscommon. The building was originally designed to accommodate 230. The PRA is continuing to work with the Office of Public Works to maximise the occupancy in the Government buildings in Roscommon on Golf Links Road. For some months now, a small number of staff from the Roscommon Enterprise Board has been occupying part of the accommodation. Approximately 50 staff from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine are scheduled to re-locate to the Golf Links Road building in the early part of December 2012.

Immigrant Investor Programme

142. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of applications received and approved to date under the immigrant investor programme and the start up entrepreneur scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48808/12]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service has informed me that there continues to be a significant number of enquiries from potential applicants and their representatives for both programmes. To date, three applications for the Immigrant Investor Programme have been received as well as eighteen applications for the Start-up Entrepreneur Programme. On foot of the recommendations of the first Evaluation Committee meeting I have approved one application under the Immigrant Investor Programme and two applications under the Start-up Entrepreneur Programme. I understand that two of the applications received for the Immigrant Investor Programme and eleven of the applications received for the Start-up Entrepreneur Programme will be considered at the next meeting of the Evaluation Committee at the end of November.

Property Services Regulatory Authority

143. **Deputy Seán Kenny** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress that has been made by the Property Services Regulatory Authority in registering property management companies and management agents; the way the Property Service Regulatory Authority is impacted by the Multi Unit Development Act; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48818/12]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The Property Services Regu-

latory Authority was established on 3 April 2012 under the Property Services (Regulation) Act 2011 to regulate, control and supervise property services providers (i.e. auctioneers/estate agents, letting agents and property management agents) and to establish and enforce standards within the property services industry.

A new licensing regime has been established under the Act and to date a total of 5,107 licence applications for the provision of property services have been received. The property services in question are: (a) the auction of property other than land, (b) the purchase or sale, by whatever means, of land, (c) the letting of land, or (d) property management services. Of the applications received to date some 535 are from persons whose principal business is the provision of property management services. A number of persons holding licences for the sale and letting of land may also occasionally engage in the provision of property management services.

The Property Services Regulatory Authority has no statutory function under the Multi-Unit Development Act 2011. In relation to property management companies in multi-unit developments, the Multi-Unit Developments Act 2011 provides the statutory basis for such companies (which are generally known as owners' management companies and which comprise the owners of units in the development) to take ownership of and manage the common areas of multi-unit developments and provides for the fair and effective management of such developments. In general, an owners' management company is a company registered under the Companies Acts and, as such, is subject to company law.

Garda Stations Closures

144. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans for the future of a Garda station (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48857/12]

145. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans for the future of Garda stations in County Offaly; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48858/12]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I propose to take Questions Nos. 144 and 145 together.

Any proposals for the closure of Garda stations must be contained in the annual policing plan prepared by the Commissioner and submitted to the Minister for Justice and Equality. While the policing plan for 2013 has not yet been finalised, it will be laid before the House in due course. Until then it would be premature to speculate on what it might contain. In preparing the policing plan, the Garda Commissioner reviews all aspects of the Garda Síochána's policing model, including the deployment of personnel, the utilisation of modern technologies and the operation of Garda districts and stations, in terms of resource allocation, the opening hours and possible closures. In addition, all divisional officers are asked to assess the level of activity in each Garda station in their area, including the ones referred to by the Deputy. It must be stressed that the key objective of the review is to promote the more efficient and effective deployment of resources rather than secure modest cash savings so that as many gardaí as possible are deployed on front line operational duty rather than based in Garda stations.

Civil Marriages Numbers

146. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding full civil marriages for gay and lesbian couples; and if he will make a statement on the

matter. [48860/12]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): Legislation providing for same-sex marriage cannot be enacted without an amendment to the Constitution following a decision of the people in a referendum on the matter in accordance with Article 46 of the Constitution. In this regard the programme for Government includes a commitment to establish a Constitutional Convention to consider constitutional reform on a number of issues including provision for same-sex marriage. I understand that the first official meeting of the Constitutional Convention, which will be chaired by Mr. Tom Arnold, is to take place in Dublin Castle on 1 December.

Closed Circuit Television Systems

147. **Deputy Tom Hayes** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding funding under the community CCTV programme in respect of Tipperary town RAPID programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48866/12]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The community-based CCTV Scheme was launched in 2005 to provide financial assistance towards the capital costs of establishing a Community CCTV system. To date, two major rounds of the scheme have been advertised, in 2005/2006 and 2007. The scheme provided for a substantive grant of up to €100,000 towards the capital cost of establishing a system. In addition it provided pre-development grants of up to €5,000 to assist local communities to develop proposals for CCTV systems. In the context of the Scheme, matching funding was also made available for RAPID areas.

I have been advised by Pobal, who administer the scheme on behalf of my Department, that the Tipperary Rapid Anti-Social Behaviour Working Group received a pre-development grant under Round 2 of the scheme. The current position is that funding provided under the previous two rounds has been fully allocated and no decision has been made in relation to the possible further extension of the scheme. However, any future plans for such an extension will depend on a number of factors, including the availability of funding, the progression of the projects already grant aided and overall policy considerations.

Garda Training

148. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the dates on which the intoxilyzers training course were held in 2012; the number of Gardaí who attended each of the courses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48876/12]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I am informed by the Garda authorities that no intoxilyser training courses have been delivered to date in 2012.

Closed Circuit Television Systems

149. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will increase the number of Garda CCTV cameras in Dublin city centre; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48877/12]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): Garda CCTV systems are planned and implemented on the basis of An Garda Síochána's identified operational require-

ments. Accordingly, decisions in relation to the introduction or extension of such systems are a matter for the Garda Commissioner. In that context, I am advised by the Garda authorities that while there are currently no plans to increase the number of Garda cameras in operation in Dublin city centre the position is being kept under on-going review.

Prisoner Releases

150. **Deputy Paschal Donohoe** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he has provided funding for works to redevelop a residence (details supplied) in Dublin 7 as a residence for transition housing for released prisoners; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48888/12]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I can advise the Deputy that funding has not been provided by my Department to develop the residence referred to for transition housing for released prisoners.

Court Procedures

151. **Deputy John Lyons** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will provide further information on his planned reforms of the family court system; the measures that will be implemented to make it a more transparent and open system; and if he will provide a timeline for the publication of any draft legislation in this area. [48899/12]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The Deputy will be aware that the Government recently approved in principle my proposals for reforms to our courts structures which will, in due course, require the holding of a constitutional referendum. The proposed reforms are intended, if approved in a referendum, to facilitate the establishment of a new separate family courts structure which will streamline family law court processes and make them more efficient and less costly. Considerable work will be necessary to develop these proposals and this has already commenced in my Department. A decision on the timing of the necessary referendum will be made at a later date.

In addition, on 31 October 2012 the Government approved my proposals for the urgent drafting of a Bill to amend the *in camera* rule in order to introduce greater transparency in the administration of family and child care law. The existing statutory privacy provisions in respect of family and child care court proceedings will be retained while allowing the attendance in court of *bona fide* members of the press as is the case in the trial of sexual offences. A strict prohibition will apply on reporting of material likely to identify the parties to the proceedings and any children to which the proceedings relate. Media access and reporting of cases will add transparency to the conduct of family law and child care proceedings and will provide valuable information on the operation of the law.

As I indicated in response to Question No. 10 of 24 October 2012, there are also alternatives to court available in the area of family law and I intend to bring forward, in the coming months, a Bill to promote mediation as a viable and cost effective alternative to court proceedings. The main objective of the Bill is the reduction of legal costs, the speeding up of dispute resolution and the lessening of the stress involved in court proceedings. These provisions are designed to ensure that the legal framework supports the parties in reaching an agreed and enduring resolution to their disputes where possible.

Crime Prevention Officers

152. **Deputy Tom Hayes** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will provide an update regarding the appointment of a crime prevention officer for County Tipperary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48908/12]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I have been informed by the Garda Commissioner that under the GRACE Programme, which was established in September 2011, the Commissioner has tasked a small group to examine the overall operational effectiveness and resilience of the Force and recommend where further savings and effectiveness could be achieved. One of the issues being addressed is the role of the Crime Prevention Officers, CPO. The replacement of CPOs has been deferred pending the outcome of this examination.

Local Garda management in Tipperary advises that the crime prevention function of An Garda Síochána being provided to the community has not been adversely affected as crime prevention and personal security advice is being provided by appropriate divisional resources. Where more in-depth specialist advices are required the services of the divisional crime prevention officer from the neighbouring Waterford Garda division are utilised.

Proposed Legislation

153. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding the proposed Coroners Bill; the main measures contained in the Bill; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48992/12]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The Coroners Bill 2007 is before the Seanad having been restored to the Order Paper on my initiative. The Bill is in the course of being reviewed in my Department with a view, among other matters, to making it as cost-effective as possible. The Bill, as published, provides for the comprehensive reform of the existing legislation and structures relating to coroners and provides for the establishment of a new Coroner Service. The Bill incorporates many of the recommendations made by the coroners review group in 2000 and the Coroners Rules committee in 2003 and it aims to fulfil various obligations placed on the State by the European Convention on Human Rights and, particularly, the Article 2 requirement in relation to the investigation of deaths of persons involving the State.

The key elements of the Bill include:

- enhancing inquiry and inquest processes,
- establishing the office of Chief Coroner to provide leadership and direction in all coronial matters;
- providing the necessary legal framework for the establishment of a new Coroner Service;
- moving to a smaller number of full-time coroners;
- statutory requirement to ensure that family members are notified at significant steps of the coronial process;
- clarifying a specific regime for coroner post-mortem examinations, including provision for retention and release of body parts and bodily samples, and
- promoting cooperation between coroners and other agencies also involved in investiga-

tions of deaths.

It would be my hope to progress the Coroners Bill next year.

The Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2011 provides for some early reforms in coronial matters, including an amalgamation of the Dublin County and City coronial districts.

Visa Applications

154. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding the visa waiver programme; the uptake of the programme to date; the tourism dividend from residents of countries to which the visa waiver programme pertains; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48994/12]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The Irish Short-stay Visa Waiver Programme, which was devised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service, INIS, of my Department, commenced on 1 July 2011 and was originally scheduled to run on a pilot basis until the end of October 2012. It allows tourists or business people who have lawfully entered the UK, including Northern Ireland, on a valid UK visa to travel on to Ireland without the requirement to obtain an Irish visa. The Government decided on 12 March 2012 to extend the programme for a further period of four years i.e. to end October 2016 in the light, particularly, of the positive response from tourism agencies and operators.

The programme applies to nationals of 17 countries (increasing from 16 on 1 November 2012 to include nationals of Bosnia and Herzegovina) mainly from Asia (including China and India), the former Soviet Union and the Gulf and Middle East regions all of which are regarded as key development markets for Irish business and tourism interests. The programme has been widely welcomed by the business and tourism sectors as an aid to developing important overseas markets.

Tourism Ireland, the organisation responsible for promoting the island of Ireland overseas as a leading holiday destination, has reported some significant success indicators for the programme:

- 36 new tour operator itineraries from China have been established since the start of the Programme.

- Existing Chinese tour operators have added almost 2,500 people to their tours between July 2011 and August 2012.

- Publicity about the Programme in China generated the equivalent of over €855,000 of advertising in the same period.

- 20 tour operators in India have reported new itineraries or additional passengers since the launch of the Programme.

- A number of tour operators in the Gulf region have added Ireland to their tourist itineraries for the first time.

It has not been possible to ascertain exactly how many people have made use of the Visa Waiver Programme as the only comprehensive way of doing so would be to check all persons arriving at ports of entry in Ireland. It was considered that the potential disruption to tourists, especially during peak summer months, outweighed the benefit to be got from having an exact count of usage of the Waiver. It is proposed, however, to conduct a focussed survey to provide

information from which the use of the programme can be extrapolated. The methodology of such a survey will take into account the need to ensure as speedy a transit through immigration control for legitimate tourists and business visitors as possible.

My Department is constantly seeking ways in which the visa system can facilitate increased business and tourism from growing markets and, in this regard, meets regularly with tourism and business promotion agencies to discuss initiatives in this area.

Criminal Legal Aid

155. **Deputy John Browne** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 158 of 25 October 2012, if there are any further and or secondary fees to which solicitors and barristers are entitled to claim under the Criminal Legal Aid scheme in an indictable matter, other than those set out in the schedule attached to the reply to the previous parliamentary question, for example, fees for consultations and / or consideration of disclosure requirements in a particular case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49012/12]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): My reply to Parliamentary Question No. 158 on 25 October 2012 set out details of the main fees payable under the criminal legal aid scheme. I also informed the Deputy that disbursements may be covered which are reasonably made for the purposes of a case by a solicitor and are of a reasonable amount and that travel and subsistence expenses are payable to solicitors. No fee is normally paid for the review of disclosed material as this is deemed to be covered by the brief fee. The regulations also allow for the following claims for fees and expenses to be paid in certain circumstances: (a) solicitor and counsel can claim a fee of €97.22 in respect of any visit to a person in prison that is essential to the preparation and conduct of the person's defence and €91.52 in respect of a contested bail application to the Circuit Court or Special Criminal Court; (b) a consultation fee in connection with a criminal legal aid case (other than on a hearing date) can be claimed by solicitor and counsel where their client is on bail (amount depends on the duration of the consultation).

Crime Prevention

156. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the steps that he is taking to prevent metal theft from public places such as parks, roadsides and church grounds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49016/12]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I can assure the Deputy that An Garda Síochána is very much aware of the increase in the theft of metal and is targeting such crime, as well as burglaries and theft-related crimes generally, through a number of initiatives. Garda divisional officers have been advised of measures which can be put in place to prevent and reduce the opportunity for such crime, involving relevant external stakeholders where appropriate. Crime Prevention officers are also engaged in providing advice to members of the public, businesses and other organisations, including in the context of the locations referred to by the Deputy.

Tackling such crime requires a collaborative effort and targeted multi-agency response. Following an analysis of crime trends, An Garda Síochána has established a metal theft forum involving stakeholders particularly affected by this type of crime, including the Irish Farmers' Association, the Irish Creamery Milk Suppliers association, the Electricity Supply Board, telecoms, transport companies, brewing concerns and the Department of the Environment, Com-

munity and Local Government. A metal theft crime prevention and reduction plan is at an advanced stage of development following discussion with the metal theft forum. I look forward to the outcome of this process so that a properly considered and strategic response can be put in place, to supplement the existing crime prevention and detection operations which An Garda Síochána have in place to tackle this type of crime.

Defence Forces Reserve Review

157. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Defence if he will ensure that the FCA unit in Longford Town continues in operation, as it was promised that it would remain open in Longford following the closure of Connolly Barracks; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48809/12]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): A value for money review of the Reserve Defence Force was recently completed and submitted to myself and the Secretary General of my Department for consideration. In advance of the publication of its accompanying report and in line with the guidelines and normal procedure for value for money reviews, the responses to the recommendations are currently being developed. Until such time as these deliberations are finalised, I cannot comment on any aspect of the future of the Reserve.

Question No. 158 answered with Question No. 7.

Defence Forces Reserve Training

159. **Deputy Gerald Nash** asked the Minister for Defence his future plans for the continuation of the Reserve Defence Force training facilities at a location (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48781/12]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): A value for money review of the Reserve Defence Force was recently completed and submitted to myself and the Secretary General of my Department for consideration. In advance of the publication of its accompanying Report and in line with the guidelines and normal procedure for value for money reviews, the responses to the recommendations are currently being developed. Until such time as these deliberations are finalised, I cannot comment on any aspect of future plans for the Reserve.

Air Corps Recruitment

160. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Defence the number of vacancies in the Air Corps Apprentices that have been currently filled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48881/12]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): I have been advised by the Military Authorities that no Air Corps apprenticeship vacancies have been filled in 2012. However, an Air Corps apprenticeship competition which was advertised on 27 September 2012 is on-going, from which it is planned to enlist 20 apprentices by the end of the year.

This recruitment will be carried out within the resource envelope allocated to Defence.

Defence Forces Reorganisation

161. **Deputy Brian Walsh** asked the Minister for Defence if personnel attached to Dún Uí Mhaoiliosa, County Galway, will be required to relocate as part of plans for the reorganisation of the Defence Forces; the number of such personnel; the process by which these will be identified; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48982/12]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): The 1 Infantry Battalion Dún Uí Mhaoiliosa Galway will increase its establishment from 318 to 496 as part of the Defence Forces reorganisation. Consequently all personnel currently serving in or attached to the 1 Infantry Battalion will be offered the opportunity to take up appointments in the new establishment. This may require some individuals to change service corps. The position as regards members of the Permanent Defence Force serving as cadre with Reserve Defence Force (RDF) units will be clarified once the outcome of the RDF value for money report has been decided upon.

Defence Forces Reserve Review

162. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Defence if he will confirm that he received a value for money report from the Reserve Defence Forces; when same will be published in view of the fact that it appears that loyal members of the Reserve Defence Forces have been left in limbo and are unaware of the proposals regarding same; if he will arrange a meeting between the representative body of the Reserve Defence Forces and his officials to discuss same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49002/12]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): The value for money review of the Reserve Defence Force was completed and submitted to me for consideration last month. Responses to the recommendations contained in this report are currently being developed and will be completed in advance of its publication. This is a normal part of the VFM process and consistent with the guidelines for such reviews. When this process is completed my Department will arrange a full briefing for the representative associations. Whilst I do not have a specific date for its publication, I anticipate that this will take place in the near future.

Defence Forces Deployment

163. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Defence the extent to which the Army, Navy and Air Corps have assisted in emergencies including natural disasters over the past 10 years; if he is satisfied that the Defence Forces will retain this capacity in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49027/12]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): The Defence Forces have played a major role in emergency response, at both a national and local level over the past decade. Examples of this response in recent years are: the establishment of countrywide designated support teams to assist in response to the threat of an avian flu outbreak in 2008; provision of wide ranging support from the Army, Air Corps and Naval Service during the extensive flooding experienced in 2009 and the assistance provided to the principal response agencies during the prolonged periods of severe weather from November 2009 to January 2010 and from November 2010 to December 2010. An ash plume caused by a series of volcanic eruptions in Iceland in April and May 2010 resulted in widespread disruption to air traffic and throughout this period the Naval Service provided search and rescue cover on the south west coast as the Irish Coastguard could not fly helicopters in the area. The Naval Service also was on standby to transfer HSE patients

to the UK. In 2011 the Air Corps and the Army responded to a request from the local authorities to assist in fire-fighting efforts in Counties Donegal and Mayo where forest and gorse fires had broken out.

The recent reorganisation in the Defence Forces encompasses a reduction in the number of Army Brigades from three to two larger brigades, a reduction in the number of headquarters, re-deployment of personnel to operational units, the consolidation of under-strength Units and the disestablishment of certain units. I am committed to maintaining the capacity of the Permanent Defence Force to meet their operational requirements and I am satisfied that the Defence Forces have the ability to fulfil all roles that may be assigned to them in response to an emergency or crisis event.

Questions Nos. 164 and 165 taken with Question No. 17.

Defence Forces Strength

166. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Defence if he will indicate the number of military posts vacant or otherwise awaiting to be filled at all ranks in the Army, Navy and Air Corps as at 1 January 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012; the extent to which all or part thereof have been filled to date or remain to be filled including promotions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49030/12]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): The strength of the Permanent Defence Force all ranks for the years 2008 to 2012 is as follow; 2008 – 10,409, 2009 – 9,906, 2010 – 9,550 and 2011- 9,438. Figures are based on the strength at the end of December for each year as statistics are compiled for the end of each month rather than the beginning of the month. The total number of vacancies all ranks are therefore as follows: 2008 – 91; 2009 – 594; 2010 – 450; 2011 – 62. Table A outlines the strength, broken down into Army, Navy and Air Corps, and the total vacancies, by rank, based on the rank establishment of 9,500 versus the strength of 9,028. These figures relate to 30 September 2012 which is the latest date for which figures are available.

In relation to promotions I announced a major re-organisation of the Permanent Defence Force on Tuesday, 17 July, 2012. The re-organisation will involve the relocation of Permanent Defence Force units and personnel and the disestablishment of certain units. At this stage detailed information is not available as to which personnel may move to new locations with their units or the number of personnel who will wish to remain in the locations affected by the re-organisation. These issues, including the effect of the changes on promotion posts to be filled and the location of such posts are currently being worked through as part of the implementation process which includes discussions with the representative associations. Therefore, it is not possible to definitely state at this time where and what promotions will be implemented over the remainder of this year.

Table B outlines the promotions within the Permanent Defence Force which have been carried out to 30 October 2012. Promotions will be carried out within the resource envelope allocated to Defence.

TABELA - PDF Strength by rank as at 30 September 2012 versus PDF Rank Establishment of 9,500

	LT-GEN	MAJ-GEN	BRIG-GEN	COL	LT-COL	COM-DT	CA-PT	Lt	BSM	BQMS	CS	CQMS	Sgts	Cpls	PTES/CA-DETS	TOTAL
9,500 Rank Establishment	1	2	8	41	137	336	452	256	44	43	245	199	1,330	1800	4,606	9,500
Army Strength at 30 September 2012	1	1	6	31	108	260	324	242	23	26	75	156	809	1397	3835	7294
Air Corps Strength at 30 September 2012	0	1	1	1	13	33	57	29	6	3	30	8	109	181	284	756
Navy Strength at 30 September 2012	0	0	1	2	12	44	56	48	6	7	50	9	157	180	406	978
Vacancies by rank	0	0	0	-7	-4	+1	-15	+63	-9	-7	-90	-26	-255	-42	-81	-472

TABLE B

The number of promotions which have occurred in the PDF in 2012 to 30 October are as follows:

-	-	-	Officer Promotions	-	-	-	NCO Promotions
Rank Promoted To	Army	Naval Service	Air Corps	Rank Promoted To	Army	Naval Service	Air Corps
Major General	1			Battalion Sergeant Major		2	
Brigadier General	4			Battalion Quartermaster Sergeant	5	3	
Colonel	10			Company Sergeant		23	

-	-	-	Officer Promotions	-	-	-	NCO Promotions
Lieutenant Colonel	20			Company Quartermaster Sergeant		6	
Commandant	62	13	10				
Captain	56	6	7	Corporal	90	11	17
Lieutenant	34	1	3				
Total	187	20	20	Total	95	45	17
Total Officers			227	Total NCO Promotions			157

Defence Forces Retirement Scheme

167. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Defence the total number of retirements, at all ranks and by gender from the Army, Navy and Air Corps in each of the past four years to date; the level of replacement in the same period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49031/12]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): It was not possible to provide the detailed information sought by the Deputy in the time available. My Department is currently seeking to compile the relevant data and I will provide the information directly to the Deputy once it comes to hand.

Question No. 168 answered with Question No. 12.

Search and Rescue Service

169. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Defence if he is satisfied that air sea rescue services at Navy and Air Corps level continue to be adequately staffed and funded in view of the extent of coastline and the need to combat drug or people trafficking; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49033/12]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): The Irish Coast Guard has overall responsibility for the provision of search and rescue services within the Irish search and rescue region and the responsibility for the prevention of drug-trafficking and people trafficking rests primarily with the Revenue Commissioners and An Garda Síochána respectively. However, the White Paper on Defence provides a role for the Naval Service and the Air Corps to assist and support the civil authorities in this work. In this regard, the Air Corps and the Naval Service provide support to these agencies as the need arises and within their available capabilities. A service level agreement is in place with the Irish Coast Guard which sets out the search and rescue assistance that the Air Corps and Naval Service can provide to the Coast Guard. The provision of onshore assistance by Air Corps helicopters for mountain rescue operations is covered in the agreement as is the fixed wing top cover by the Air Corps Casa aircraft to Coast Guard

helicopters offshore. Assistance that is provided by the Naval Service to the Coast Guard during maritime search and rescue and recovery operations is also included in the Service Level Agreement.

Government measures to improve law enforcement in relation to drugs, including the establishment in 1993 of a Joint Task Force involving An Garda Síochána, the Customs Service and the Naval Service, have helped to maximise the effective use of Naval Service resources in combating drug trafficking. The Air Corps provide air support and, on occasion, carry the Customs national drugs team in an observational capacity for the purpose of monitoring vessels suspected of drug trafficking and other illegal activities. There is close co-operation between the civil authorities and the Naval Service and the Air Corps in discharging this important mission.

Furthermore, Ireland along with other EU Member States participate in the EU Maritime Analysis and Operations Centre – Narcotics, MAOC-N. This Centre has led to a greater focus on intelligence exchange amongst countries to tackle large drug shipments by sea. MAOC-N was set up by seven European countries and is designed as an international co-ordination force.

Naval Service vessels are multi-tasked in the sense that they also undertake general surveillance, security and other duties while on fishery patrol. The Air Corps maritime squadron carries out aerial surveillance of territorial waters using the two CASA maritime patrol aircraft. These aircraft are equipped with state-of-the-art surveillance and communication equipment which offers aerial assistance to the Naval Service in patrolling the Irish Exclusive Economic Zone.

In relation to maritime surveillance generally, an inter-departmental maritime surveillance working group, chaired by the Department of Transport, was established under the auspices of the marine co-ordination group. The Group is working towards the creation of a common information-sharing environment to enhance safety and security within the Irish maritime domain.

I am satisfied that both the Air Corps and Naval Service have the necessary resources to meet their operational requirements in these important areas.

Defence Forces Properties

170. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Defence the extent to which he expects receipts from the disposal of military barracks or other installations to go towards the upgrading of military capability in terms of equipment or otherwise; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49034/12]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): The monies received from the sales of surplus properties have returned to the Defence Vote as Appropriations in Aid. The increased levels of appropriations in aid have allowed the retention of funding levels for re-equipment. Some of the major more recent programmes include the acquisition of light tactical armoured vehicles, Mowag armoured personnel carriers, two EC 135 helicopters, six AW 139 helicopters and two new offshore patrol vessels. This approach is in line with the 2000 White Paper on Defence and the Government decision of February 2000 which, inter alia, approved “ the allocation of100% of the revenue arising from the sale of property surplus to military requirements, for investment in equipment and infrastructure for the Defence Forces”.

Defence Forces Retirement Scheme

171. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Defence the number of women who have retired from the Defence Forces in each of the past three years to date; the number of women recruits in the same period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49035/12]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): The following table sets out the number of women who have left the Permanent Defence Force and the number of women who were inducted into the Permanent Defence Force in each of the years 2010 and 2011, and at 31 October 2012, the latest date for which figures are available. The Government is committed to a policy of equal opportunity for men and women throughout the Defence Forces and to the full participation by women in all aspects of Defence Forces activities. Unlike many other national armed forces, the Defence Forces have no restrictions as regards the assignment of men or women to the full range of operational and administrative duties. All promotions and career courses are open to both genders on merit.

The number of women in the Permanent Defence Force has risen from 567 (5.7% of overall strength) at the beginning of 2010 to 573 (6.26% of overall strength) as at 31 October 2012.

YEAR	DISCHARGES	INTAKE
2010	12	14
2011	25	21
2012 to 31/10/12	18	26
TOTAL	55	61

Defence Forces Recruitment

172. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Defence the number of cadets enrolled in each of the past four years to date by gender; the number at passing out; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49036/12]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): The number, by gender, of cadets inducted to the Permanent Defence Force in each year 2009 to 2012 along with the number who were subsequently commissioned as officers is shown in the following tabular statement. The difference between those inducted and those subsequently commissioned or still in training reflects those who were discharged before completion of training.

As with all recruitment to the Permanent Defence Force, the intake of cadets is within the resource envelope allocated to Defence.

NUMBER OF CADETSHIPS AWARDED AND NUMBER OF CADETS COMMISSIONED 2009 – 2012

Year	Female Intake	Male Intake	Females Commissioned	Males Commissioned	Females Still In Training	Males Still In Training
2009	9	33	7	29	0	0
2010	3	27	3	23	0	3
2011	2	30	0	0	2	28
2012	4	33	0	0	4	32

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Payments

173. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will receive their disadvantaged area aid and single farm payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48764/12]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Processing of the application concerned has recently been completed and payments under the single payment scheme and disadvantaged areas scheme will shortly issue to the nominated bank account of the person named.

Single Payment Scheme Payments

174. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will receive their single farm payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48768/12]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Payment under the 2012 single payment scheme issued on 16 October to the nominated bank account of the person named.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Payments

175. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason a person (details supplied) in County Cork is not receiving their disadvantaged area payment in view of the fact that they have breeding mares on their farm. [48769/12]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): While the person named applied for derogation under the 2012 disadvantaged areas scheme, the application was unsuccessful. In the derogation application, documentation was submitted in relation to additional horses on the holding in 2011, over and above those previously notified to my Department; however, even when these are taken into account, the stocking density of the holding in 2011 remains below the minimum required of 0.3 livestock units per forage hectare. On this basis, the derogation application was not accepted.

The applicant was notified of this decision in writing and advised of the right of appeal to the recently established independent DAS appeals committee.

Forestry Grants

176. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will examine the current payment being made to a person (details supplied) in respect of a forestry contract. [48773/12]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The applicant planted 11.92 hectares under his afforestation contract in May 2000. The calculation of his premiums is based on this amount and the correct rates are also applied. Therefore, the amount of €5,692.32 that is now being paid to the applicant is correct.

Agrifood Sector Issues

177. **Deputy Arthur Spring** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if there is a capacity to grow more crops here where a commercial market price can be achieved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48783/12]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The maintenance of an efficient and viable cereals sector in Ireland is clearly very important to the well being of the agrifood industry. Indigenous production of cereals is of course, an important part of primary agriculture production. In addition to generating an income for our tillage farmers, the cereals sector is a key source of grain for the milling and malting industry and feeding stuffs for the livestock sector. Annual cereals production in Ireland has fluctuated around 2 million tonnes in recent years and it is desirable to try and sustain this level of production in order to avoid over dependence on imported cereals. According to the CSO cereals supply balance sheet, Ireland had 74% self-sufficiency in cereals in 2010/2011. Imports of cereals in that period amounted to 938,000 tonnes, down 14% or 155,000 tonnes on the previous year.

Since Ireland is a deficit market for cereals, prices here are greatly affected by world prices and supplies. In 2010, increased demands for grain from the biofuels sector and the growing needs of new emerging markets like China and India drove up world grain market prices. In line with this rise in world prices, grain prices in Ireland increased and growers here reacted by increasing the acreage sown. This resulted in a bumper harvest in 2011 with total grain production of almost 2.5m tonnes. The preliminary estimate for the 2012 grain harvest is forecast to be lower than the record harvest of 2011 due to the persistent adverse weather during the growing season and will be of the order of 2 million tonnes, despite a significant increase in cereal area planted in 2011.

This is consistent with the long-term average production of 2 million tonnes but 20% lower than the 2011 harvest figure of 2.5 million tonnes, which was exceptionally high.

My Department operates a range of services aimed at improving the efficiency of, quality and viability of cereal production. These services include seed certification, seed testing and recommended list of varieties. In addition, Teagasc provides research, training and advisory services for cereal producers. The value of all these support services is reflected in the fact that Irish cereals producers have consistently achieved some of the highest yields in the world.

Ireland is also a significant importer of field vegetables and potatoes. Most of the Department's efforts, along with those of the State agencies involved with the horticultural industry, are focussed on increasing production for the domestic market. The opportunity for increasing outdoor horticultural crops production has become more difficult over the past five years. This is due to scale of the industry, our costs of production, competition from major suppliers around the world and the controls exercised by the supermarkets. The very difficult weather conditions over the past five years, including two very severe winters plus the very poor summer weather this year, have further restricted the industry's capacity to expand production.

Aquaculture Licences Applications

178. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will expedite the processing of applications for aquaculture licences in Castlemaine harbour, County Kerry; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that these delays are hindering investment in the industry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48843/12]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Castlemaine Harbour is designated as a special area of conservation under the EU Habitats Directive and a

special protection area under the EU Birds Directive (Natura 2000 site).

My Department, in conjunction with the Marine Institute and the National Parks and Wildlife Service, NPWS, of the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, has engaged in a major programme to gather the necessary baseline data appropriate to the conservation objectives of aquaculture sites located within designated Natura areas, including Castlemaine Harbour.

The setting of conservation objectives and the carrying out of an appropriate assessment for the purpose of ensuring compliance with the conservation objectives has been completed in respect of Castlemaine. The general licensing implications have been examined by my Department and the public consultation stage of the licensing process is imminent.

Rural Environment Protection Scheme Applications

179. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will investigate the delay in the processing a REP scheme application in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48852/12]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named commenced REPS 4 in June 2009 and received payments for the first two years of their contract. In addition, in May 2009 the person named was awarded a contract under the Organic Farming Scheme and commenced participation in this scheme in June 2009.

REPS 4 is a measure under the Rural Development Programme 2007-13 and is subject to EU regulations which require detailed administrative checks on all applications to be completed before payments can issue. Following an inspection in 2011 an anomaly was discovered in relation to both Natura and Habitats on lands owned by the person named. Consequently, a letter issued to the person named from my Department on 13 November 2011 requesting clarification of specific matters. As these queries have not been satisfactorily addressed, my Department will now process the REPS payment for 2011 based on the information to hand.

Trade Missions Numbers

180. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will provide an update on Irish agricultural and seafood trade with China; if he will provide an overview of the April 2012 trade mission to China that he led; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48906/12]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): China is a key strategic trade partner for Ireland and has a strong demand for imports of quality food, given the size of its population and concerns over food security and safety. Ireland is strategically placed to be a key supplier of quality meats, dairy products, beverages, seafood and other products and services to China. In 2011, Ireland exported €244 million of these products to China. In the first six months of this year, Ireland has exported €181 million in dairy products, pigmeat, seafood, beverages and other agri-related products to China. This is a 39% increase on the same period last year, at which time we had exported €130 million. Total exports of Irish seafood to China in 2011 were €2.9 million, but the latest data up to July 2012 shows exports of seafood at €5.3 million, representing an 80% increase on 2011. This dramatic increase demonstrates the new business relationships Ireland has developed with key Chinese buyers.

Last April I lead the largest ever Irish agrifood trade delegation to China, with representatives from the meat, dairy, seafood, beverages, bloodstock and agriservices sectors and government bodies. The trade delegation which my Department, Bord Bia and Enterprise Ireland brought together, comprised of a total of 51 Irish companies and 127 individual. This was in addition to Government agencies such as Teagasc, BIM, the Marine Institute, the Sea Fisheries Protection Agency, Irish Thoroughbred Marketing and leading universities involved in the provision of educational courses in food safety and agricultural science.

During the trade mission, a memorandum of Understanding, MOU, between my Department and the Chinese Inspection and Quarantine Service, AQSIQ, on (i) sanitary and phytosanitary issues, including provision for the establishment of a joint working group on SPS issues, b) the export of horse feed to China, and c) renewal of the bovine semen protocol was concluded. The MOU between my Department and the Chinese Ministry of Agriculture on mutual cooperation in the agri-food and fisheries areas was also renewed and a new MOU was signed between the Marine Institute and the Chinese Academy of Fishery Sciences; this MOU builds on research work between the two institutions, facilitated by the action plan which I agreed with the Chinese Ministry of Agriculture in May 2011 on Mutual Cooperation.

In addition, some significant commercial outcomes were also achieved during the visit including the announcement of a \$50 million project involving an Irish company in a joint venture in establishing a major Chinese equine facility; market access and conclusion of a contract by an Irish company for the supply of horsefeed to China, the first foreign company to gain such a contract; the signing of agreements between BIM and eight Irish seafood companies to supply China with commercial samples of boar fish to China; the conclusion of an agreement by an Irish dairy company on an increased volume of dairy and nutritional ingredients to be supplied to the Chinese market and the launch of a range of Irish dairy products on the Chinese market.

Meeting were also held with a range of number of Chinese food companies which have lead to increased business opportunities and in one case a significant partnership agreement in terms of the supply of infant formula has since been concluded.

Since my visit there have been a number of follow on visits to Ireland by Chinese Ministers including Vice Minister Gao Hongbin of the Ministry of Agriculture with responsibility for animal husbandry and veterinary controls, who visited in May and Vice Minister Wei Chuanzhong of AQSIQ who visited in June. This latter visit resulted in the signing of Protocols on the direct export of horses from Ireland to China and on the export of fresh porcine semen to China. In addition, an MOU was concluded on the setting up of a technical working group on BSE, for market access for Irish beef. That working group has now been established.

The Mayor of Nanjing, Ji Jianye, who I met when in China also made a visit to Ireland in August, and was accompanied by one of the world's largest pigmeat processors. There have also been follow up visits in relation to the purchase of thoroughbred horses. In relation to the seafood sector, trade in boarfish with China has commenced and opportunities for developing this trade are being assessed.

At government agency level, the Chinese Academy of Fisheries Science made a return visit in July of 2012 to investigate research possibilities with the Marine Institute. The areas of aquaculture and fisheries technology and sea food safety were of particular interest, and the group were shown the Institute's research activities in bio-toxin chemistry, fish stock assessment, micro-tagging of hatchery juvenile fish and fish genetics. Continuing collaboration is currently being scheduled. In October AQSIQ visited the Sea Fisheries Protection Agency.

Following from the Irish/Sino Forum on Building a Safe and Sustainable Future of Food Production, which took place during my visit to China, Teagasc and the Chinese Academy of

Agriculture Sciences are now developing a memorandum of understanding which it is envisaged will lead to collaborative research between both Institutes.

While all these developments have led to greater cooperation and the deepening of relationships and trust at Ministerial, official and business level, which is crucial to trade in China, the evidence of the importance of this relationship to the Irish agrifood and seafood sector is reflected in the trade statistics and the continuing growth in our exports to China.

Overall, I am very pleased with the outcome of my trade visit to China and the very important follow up in terms of return visits by Ministers and industry, the growing collaboration between government agencies in areas of research and mutual cooperation and the tangible commercial outcomes. I would anticipate that our agri-food and seafood exports to China will continue to grow.

Suckler Welfare Scheme Applications

181. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a suckler cow grant in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Sligo will issue; the reason for the delay in processing this application; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48915/12]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): An error identified with the application concerned has now been resolved and payment will issue in the near future to the applicant.

Aquaculture Licences Applications

182. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding the planned development of certified organic salmon production units at deep sea sites off the Irish coast; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48997/12]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Bord Iascaigh Mhara, BIM, has submitted an application for an aquaculture licence for the cultivation of finfish near Inis Oírr in Galway Bay. The application and its accompanying Environmental Impact Statement is currently being considered in accordance with the provisions of the 1997 Fisheries (Amendment) Act.

My Department has also issued a site investigation licence to BIM in respect of potential sites off the Mayo coast.

I also understand that BIM is currently engaged in preliminary work with a view to a possible application for a Site Investigation Licence for an area off the coast of Donegal.

Casual Trading Regulations

183. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps that he is taking to promote farmers' markets, in each rural town; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49018/12]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Promotion

of farmers markets is primarily a matter for local authorities to whom responsibility for the granting of casual trading licences in public places is provided for under the Casual Trading Act, 1995.

In order to promote awareness of the market opportunities that farmers markets can offer to small producers my Department and Bord Bia drafted a voluntary code of good practice for farmers' markets, which was launched in June 2009. Some 36 markets are currently entitled to display the good practice banner and they are identified by the symbol on the listing of farmers' markets on Bord Bia's website (www.bordbia.ie/aboutfood/farmersmarkets). The criteria for the Good Practice Code are set out on my Department's website: <http://www.agriculture.gov.ie/agri-foodindustry/farmersmarkets> and on the Bord Bia website, which also includes a useful Guide to selling through farmers markets, farm shops and box schemes in Ireland.

Beekeeping Industry

184. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the research he is conducting on the means by which honey bees are exposed to agricultural pesticides; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49021/12]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): To date the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine has not commissioned any research directly into the exposure of Irish honeybees to pesticides. However since 2008 Ireland has participated in the COLOSS Research Network which is investigating possible causes of honeybee colony mortality worldwide. This network involves a collaboration of researchers from over 50 countries using standardised research methods to provide directly comparable results. Ireland's first comprehensive survey on colony losses for COLOSS took place over the winter of 2008-2009. Since then the survey has been repeated annually. Participation in the COLOSS network forms part of Ireland's National Apiculture Programme which is currently conducted by University of Limerick in conjunction with Teagasc. Ireland's National Apiculture Programme is administered by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine with 50% co-funding provided by the EU Commission.

As part of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine's pesticide registration process the effect on honeybee health as well as the wider ecosystem is considered before any decision is made to permit the use of a pesticide in Ireland.

Pesticides and especially insecticides can have a negative impact on honeybee mortality, however the presence of the varroa mite and its associated viruses are considered to be to be the most significant cause of colony weakening / mortality.

Ash Dieback Threat

185. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps he is taking or what research his Department is conducting to ensure that our ash trees are not exposed to ash tree disease that is crossing Europe; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49022/12]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department confirmed a finding of *Chalara fraxinea* - ash dieback - in County Leitrim in October. Since then measures were taken to protect our ash trees from the spread of this disease. Firstly all material from the imported consignment concerned was destroyed. In addition, I put in place

legislation banning the import of ash plants from countries or parts of countries known to have the disease. This Statutory Instrument came into effect from 26 October 2012 and in Northern Ireland equivalent measures were simultaneously introduced.

Further legislation was introduced this week to control the import of ash wood into the country. The details of this legislation, which came into effect yesterday, have also been agreed with Northern Ireland. The legislation will allow ash wood movement into Ireland if (1) it comes from an area free of the disease or (2) its free of outer round surface (including bark) or (3) its kiln dried below 20% moisture.

In terms of research, support is provided through my Department under the COFORD programme for studies on broadleaf tree improvement. This work is being undertaken principally in University College Dublin, in close collaboration with Coillte and Teagasc, with the aim of improving the future quality and productivity of Irish forests. In addition my Department has identified a number of ash plantations for inclusion on the official seed stand register of Ireland. Seed from these plantations will have better growth characteristics than seed from unselected stands. Three ash seed orchards have also been established in collaboration with Coillte and the Future Trees Trust, a joint UK/Ireland collaboration. My Department is also a member of EUFORGEN – the European forest genetics resources programme, which includes ash.

Children's Rights Referendum

186. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the expected cost of the Children's Referendum including a breakdown of such costs; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [48985/12]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): There is a provision of €3 million in the Vote of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs relating to the cost of holding a constitutional referendum on children's rights.

Of this €3m, the Department has allocated €1.9 million to the Referendum Commission for the performance of its statutory functions. The breakdown of this amount will become available when the Referendum Commission's report on the children's referendum is published.

The balance of €1.1 million is being used to fund the Department's public information activities. The breakdown of the actual expenditure of this figure will be provided directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

The cost of holding the actual poll will be met, as is the case with all referendums, by the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government from the Central Fund.

Mobility Allowance Appeals

187. **Deputy Nicky McFadden** asked the Minister for Health when a decision will issue on the mobility allowance appeal in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48763/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): As the Deputy's question relates to service matters I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Health Services Staff Issues

188. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health his plans for Health Service Executive staff caring for persons in the home; if he plans to privatise this service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48767/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

National Lottery Funding Applications

189. **Deputy Paul J. Connaughton** asked the Minister for Health when announcements will be made in relation to his Department's National Lottery funding payments for 2012 [48780/12]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): My Department administers a national lottery discretionary fund from which grants are paid to community and voluntary organisations providing a range of health related services. I am currently assessing all outstanding applications and a final decision will be made shortly. The funding made available by my Department from the national lottery Fund including a list of each body in receipt of funding will be set out on my Department's website - www.doh.ie thereafter.

Hospital Waiting Lists

190. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Offaly may expect an appointment with a consultant. [48784/12]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Hospital Procedures

191. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health when funding will be available to progress crucial surgery in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath. [48791/12]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Medicinal Products Supply

192. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Health if he will amend the provision of the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Bill 2012 to exclude all antiepileptic drugs, AEDs, from generic substitution and remove any threat to patient safety; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48810/12]

199. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health his views on proposals to exclude antiepileptic drugs from generic substitution as occurs in a range of OECD states; his views on whether generics to treat epilepsy should only be used when prescribed by an epilepsy specialist after the initial diagnosis and there is certainty of continuity of supply; and if he will

make a statement on the matter. [48867/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): I propose to take Questions Nos. 192 and 199 together.

Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Bill, the Irish Medicines Board has statutory responsibility for establishing and publishing a list of interchangeable medicinal products in respect of which it is satisfied that all the medicinal products which fall into a group of interchangeable medicinal products are, for prescription purposes, interchangeable with each other. It is important to point out that generic medicines must meet exactly the same standards of quality and safety and have the same effect as the originator medicine. All of the generic medicines on the Irish market are required to be properly licensed and meet the requirements of the Irish Medicines Board. To further enhance the patient safety aspect of generic substitution, section 13 of the Bill gives a prescriber the option of indicating on a prescription that a branded interchangeable medicinal product should, for clinical reasons, not be substituted.

The Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Bill 2012 was published on the 13th of July 2012. The Bill completed its passage through the Seanad on Wednesday, 19 September, and is currently continuing its passage through the Dáil. An implementation group on generic substitution and reference pricing has been established and it held its inaugural meeting on 9 August 2012. The group is to meet with stakeholders, including the Irish Epilepsy Association, in the near future.

Hospital Accommodation Provision

193. **Deputy Gerald Nash** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide in tabular form for the years 2009 to 2012 and by region the number of clinically discharged patients who remained in acute hospital beds subsequent to their discharge; if he will provide any analysis on the reasons for remaining in hospital including the numbers awaiting home help and the number awaiting approval of fair deal schemes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48819/12]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme

194. **Deputy Gerald Nash** asked the Minister for Health the average time taken to process a fair deal application; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48820/12]

195. **Deputy Gerald Nash** asked the Minister for Health if any analysis has taken place regarding delays in processing fair deal applications; the measures in place to ensure an optimum processing time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48821/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): I propose to take Questions Nos. 194 and 195 together.

The HSE's National Service Plan 2012 sets a target of four weeks for the processing of complete applications for the nursing homes support scheme. This performance indicator is reported on monthly in the HSE's performance report. In July (the most recent Performance Report available), 100% of complete applications were determined within four weeks. An application is complete when the nursing home support office has received all of the necessary documenta-

tion and information required to make a determination. Depending on the level of complexity of the individual case, processing of the application may take longer. For example, in cases where ancillary State support is sought, additional factors may impact on the timeframe, e.g. the HSE must establish title of a property before a decision can be made and establishing title can be a lengthy process in some cases.

Funding for the scheme is issued to applicants in chronological order by the date of determination of their application. This ensures equity nationally. Funding is currently being released by the HSE on a weekly basis.

Pharmacy Services

196. **Deputy Arthur Spring** asked the Minister for Health his plans to expand the range of medicines, with established safety profiles and available in other locations without prescription, that can be dispensed by pharmacists with a view to generating more savings as seen in the UK; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48828/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): I fully support the principle of delivering health services to patients in the most appropriate setting. There is a growing interest in the “self care” agenda and it is acknowledged that pharmacists have a key role to play in the treatment of minor ailments. A recent example of extending the pharmacist role is pharmacist participation in the roll-out of the seasonal ‘flu vaccination programme in 2011 and 2012.

Under the current legislation, the process whereby a medicine is switched from prescription only to pharmacist supply involves the manufacturer of the medicine making an application to the Irish Medicines Board, IMB. In making such an application, the manufacturer is required to submit appropriate scientific data to demonstrate that the medicine can be safely and correctly used by patients if available without prescription. A number of medicines have been switched from prescription control to pharmacist supply under this procedure in recent years. In addition, as part of the overall debate on switching of suitable medicines, the IMB has established a consultative panel on method of sale and supply of medicines. This Panel is representative of relevant stakeholders including my Department, the HSE, health care professionals and their regulatory bodies, patient representatives and industry representatives. The Panel is expected to conclude its work by the end of this year and its conclusions will be considered by the IMB in 2013.

Home Help Service Provision

197. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Health the number of home help hours being provided by private agencies to the Health Service Executive West in County Mayo; the identity of the agencies and the cost per hour being paid to these agencies over the past couple of years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48846/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Hospital Services

198. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding surgery in

respect of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48856/12]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Question No. 199 answered with Question No. 192.

Hospital Staff

200. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the number of radiologists currently working in a hospital (details supplied) in Dublin 9; if he will provide same in each of the past three years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48879/12]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Medical Card Applications

201. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding a medical card application in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48894/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Health Services Provision

202. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide an overview of paediatric nursing services here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48900/12]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly)(Deputy James Reilly): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

EU Directives

203. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide an update on ongoing work at European Council level to advance the EC Patient Mobility Directive; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48901/12]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly)(Deputy James Reilly): The Directive on the Application of Patients' Rights in Cross Border Healthcare was published in the EU Official Journal on 4th April 2011 and the transposition period of 30 months commenced on 24 April 2011. Member States have until October 2013 to implement the Directive.

The purpose of this directive is to establish a clear legal framework to facilitate cross border healthcare with a focus on patient rights, information for patients on entitlements and patient choice.

Given the complexity of the issues to be considered, both nationally and between Member States, it is envisaged that the transposition of the Directive into Irish law will be completed

within the transposition time frame of October 2013.

Health Services Provision

204. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 708 of 16 October 2012, when a reply will issue from the Health Service Executive [48902/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch) (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The HSE has advised that the reply to Parliamentary Question No. 708 was due to issue on 6th November 2012

Health Services Provision

205. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide an update on Health Service Executive clinical programmes in stroke, epilepsy, neurology and rehabilitation for 2013; if he will outline the funding streams that are in place for assisting voluntary and community organisations that support citizens of this state who have neurological conditions and who rely on pertinent services for support, specialist rehabilitation and respite; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48913/12]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Medicinal Products Prices

206. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the price paid by the Health Service Executive for drugs which are out of licence; if measures are being taken to reduce this price; the way price compares with other countries; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48990/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): I take it that the Deputy is referring to drugs which no longer have patent protection. The prices of such drugs vary between countries for a number of reasons, including different prices set by manufacturers, different wholesale and pharmacy mark-ups, different dispensing fees and different rates of VAT.

Following intensive negotiations with the Irish Pharmaceutical Healthcare Association, IPHA, the Department of Health and the HSE have reached agreement on a major new deal on the cost of drugs in the State. The main provisions of the new Agreement are as follows:

- With effect from 1 November 2012, the ex factory price of all patent protected medicines reimbursed in Ireland prior to September 2006 will be realigned - downwards only - to the average of the basket of nine countries (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Netherlands, Spain, and UK).

- With effect from 1 November 2012, the ex factory price of all patent expired medicines which do not have a generic equivalent on the Irish market will be realigned - downwards only - to the average of the basket of 9 countries.

- With effect from 1 November 2012, the ex factory price of all patent expired medicines which have a generic equivalent on the Irish market will be reduced to 60% of the original price. With effect from 1 November 2013, the price will be reduced to 50% of the original price.

- In the case of medicines which go off patent after 1 November 2012, the ex factory price will drop to 70% of the original price as soon as a generic equivalent comes on the Irish market. After 12 months, the price will be reduced to 50% of the original price.

- With effect from 1 January 2013, the ex factory price of medicines introduced to Ireland after 1 September 2006, will be realigned - downwards only - to the average of the basket of 9 countries.

The deal will deliver a number of important benefits, including

- significant reductions for patients in the cost of drugs,
- a lowering of the drugs bill to the State,
- timely access for patients to new cutting-edge drugs for certain conditions,
- reducing the cost base of the health system into the future.

This deal, combined with an interim agreement reached with IPHA in the summer, means that €16 million in drug savings will be made this year. It is estimated that the deal will generate savings of up to €116 million in 2013, €136 million in 2014 and €150 million on 2015.

The Department and the HSE have also completed discussions with the Association of Pharmaceutical Manufacturers in Ireland, APMI, which represents the generic drugs industry, and have secured similar reductions in the price of drugs supplied by AMPI member companies.

The Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Bill 2012, which is currently before the House, provides for the introduction of a system of generic substitution and reference pricing. It aims to promote price competition among suppliers and ensure that lower prices are paid for medicines resulting in savings for taxpayers and patients. It should lead to an increase in the rate of generic prescribing, thus generating further savings in drugs expenditure in the years ahead.

Debt Collectors Regulation

207. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the number of debt collection agencies employed by the Health Service Executive in 2011 and 2012 for the recoupment of moneys owed; the amount recouped in those years; the cost to the Health Service Executive of employing such agencies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48993/12]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): I have referred this matter to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Home Help Service Provision

208. **Deputy Peter Mathews** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding home help in respect of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 5; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49024/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Hospital Waiting Lists

209. **Deputy John Browne** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Wexford will receive a hospital appointment as a matter of urgency [49046/12]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Medical Card Drugs

210. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail** asked the Minister for Health if a drug (details supplied) is still available under the medical card scheme; if not, the reason for its withdrawal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49051/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): In the current financial environment the Health Service Executive, HSE, is facing a challenge to deliver services in a way that will minimise any adverse impact on patients and continue to protect, as far as possible, the most vulnerable citizens. Unfortunately, it has become necessary for the HSE to suspend certain products from its list of reimbursable items, including glucosamine.

Glucosamine (Osteoeze) is indicated for the management of symptoms of osteoarthritis. The National Centre for Pharmoeconomics, NCPE, has assessed the cost-effectiveness of glucosamine on two occasions and concluded that it did not offer value for money to the HSE. However, glucosamine products are available over the counter without prescriptions.

Ministerial Correspondence

211. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health if he has received representations from the Catholic Church in relation to possible legislation on abortion being introduced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44241/12]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): I have received correspondence on this issue from a number of clergy, members of religious orders, and lay people, but no official representations from bishops, archbishops or the Vatican.

National Children's Hospital Location

212. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health if he or his Department have seen or discussed the Dolphin report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45670/12]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The Dolphin report was presented to me on 8 June last by the members of the Dolphin Group. I have since then given careful consideration to the report and sought additional detailed technical analysis from those members of the Dolphin Group with the relevant expertise before bringing the report to Government with a recommendation. Yesterday, Government decided to develop the New Children's Hospital at the campus of St. James's Hospital in Dublin. In identifying the new site, the Government has carefully

considered the report of the Dolphin Group along with detailed supplementary information on cost, time and planning which was subsequently sought from members of the Group with the relevant technical expertise.

Ministerial Responsibilities

213. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health if he has signed the delegation order for the newly appointed Minister of State with special responsibility for primary care; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45671/12]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The Order is currently being drafted by the OPC, after which I will submit the Order to the Government so that the Government can make the Order.

Accident and Emergency Services Provision

214. **Deputy John Halligan** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide a progress report on the review of accident and emergency service at St. Columcille's Hospital, Loughlinstown, County Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48891/12]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Mobility Allowance Decision

215. **Deputy John Halligan** asked the Minister for Health his plans to review the mobility allowance for persons over 66 years of age; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48893/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): This matter requires further consideration by Government in order to meet the requirements of the Equal Status Acts and to ensure no hardship for those currently in receipt of the mobility allowance. The Department of Health is seeking further legal advice as to the options available to the Government. The Ombudsman is asking the Department to

- Remove the upper age limit as a condition of the mobility allowance scheme with immediate effect.
- Authorise the HSE to reconsider the application for complainants in the report without taking account of the upper age limit.-
- Instruct the HSE to reconsider applications since 1 April 2011 which were refused solely on the basis of the upper age limit without regard to the upper age limit.

The Department is not in a position to amend the circular relating to the mobility allowance as recommended in the report. The recommendations, if implemented would ignore the very serious financial constraints on the Department, the HSE and the State generally. Implementation of the recommendations would create liabilities that the State could not afford.

Home Help Service Provision

216. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to concerns being raised by home helps with regard to their lack of contracts and conditions of employment; his plans to take action regarding same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41679/12]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): On 29 June 2012, the Labour Court recommended that the HSE and SIPTU should engage in relation to matters concerning home help contracts and that in the event that there are any outstanding issues, they may be referred back to the court. The HSE engaged with SIPTU concerning the recommendation and advised that as part of the process it would be undertaking an information-gathering exercise to ascertain the up-to-date position regarding the nature of the contracts held by home helps and the hours worked under such contracts. This exercise is being undertaken at present.

Having met with the parties again on 15 October 2012, the Labour Court recommended that they should re-engage under the auspices of the Labour Relations Commission and that this engagement be completed by 30 November 2012. The parties are to meet at the LRC on 19 November 2012. It would not be appropriate for me, as Minister, to comment further on these matters while these processes are under way.

Parliamentary Questions Numbers

217. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the average response time for Parliamentary Questions referred by his Department to the Health Service Executive; if he will provide figures for the number of Parliamentary Questions processed by the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the HSE each year since it was established; the average response times for each such year; his views on whether the response time for Parliamentary Questions referred to the HSE goes beyond the response times for other questions; the steps he will take to address this issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48754/12]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): My Department receives an average of 6,000 parliamentary questions each year. Around 60% of these questions concern operational issues and are referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to Deputies. Many of these questions relate to individual patients and local day to day operational matters.

Parliamentary questions relating to operational issues of a national scale or importance are answered by myself or the relevant Minister of State instead of being referred to the HSE. Whenever possible these questions are answered on the relevant Dáil sitting day. Where this is not possible because the information is not readily available, a reply is issued as soon as possible thereafter. These are classified within my Department as ministerial response questions.

The statistical data sought by the Deputy in relation to the number of PQs referred and response times since 2005 is set out below. From 2006 to 2007 the executive worked to a time-frame of issuing responses to directly referred PQs within 20 working days of receipt. From 2008 this was reduced to 15 working days.

2005 - 2,388 referred - average response rate not available

2006 - 3,060 referred - 55% answered within 20 days

2007 - 2,744 referred - 65% answered within 20 days

2008 - 3,544 referred - 73% answered within 15 days

7 November 2012

2009 - 3,145 referred - 62% answered within 15 days

2010 - 2,550 referred - 53% answered within 15 days (Performance in this year was affected by prolonged industrial action)

2011 - 2,464 referred - 58% answered within 15 days

2012 - 3,049 referred - 75% answered within 15 days

I would like to assure the Deputy that responding to the information needs of the Oireachtas is a priority both for my Department and the Executive. As noted above, the executive is committed, in the 2012 National Service Plan, to answering 75% of directly referred Parliamentary Questions within a period of 15 working days of receipt. Performance in relation to this target it is currently being met and will continue to be monitored closely. The executive introduced a new IT system in the last quarter of 2011 and this has led to a significant improvement in its overall response time to referred questions. The most recent statistics available for this year (up to 9 October) show that of the 3,049 questions referred for direct reply this year, 2,274 (75%) have been answered within the 15 day timeframe. Taking into account questions which took longer than the 15 day timeframe to answer, the figures show that 2,981 (98%) of referred questions have now been answered. The figures for ministerial response questions show that of the 496 questions referred to the executive for input, 464 (94%) have been answered in full. Regular meetings are held with the HSE's parliamentary affairs division to monitor response times and to emphasise the importance of issuing timely and comprehensive replies to Deputies.

Questions concerning individual patients and operational matters relating to local issues will continue to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to Deputies. While my Department has ultimate accountability for the health services, it is my belief that a balance has to be struck between responsibility for local issues, which rests with local area service managers, and the ultimate accountability of Ministers.

Sports Capital Programme Applications

218. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the date on which he expects to publish the list of grants under the 2012 sports capital grant programme. [48776/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Michael Ring): My Department has received over 2,170 applications for funding under the 2012 Sports Capital Programme. This is the largest number of applications ever received under the programme. Departmental officials are processing the applications and this process will take some time due to the volume of applications received. I expect to be in a position to announce the list of successful applicants later this year. All applicants will be informed of the outcome of their application at that stage.

Sports Capital Programme Applications

219. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the schedule and procedure for processing sports grant applications; when confirmation of valid application will be notified; when payment of grant will be notified; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48778/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Mi-

chael Ring): My Department has received over 2,170 applications for funding under the 2012 Sports Capital Programme. This is the largest number of applications ever received under the programme. Departmental officials are processing the applications and this process will take some time due to the volume of applications received. I expect to be in a position to announce the successful applicants later this year. All applicants will be informed of the outcome of their application at that stage. After allocations have been made, grantees will have to satisfy certain terms and conditions such as tendering and tax clearance compliance before any payments can be made.

Departmental Reports

220. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide the names, costs, date of commission, date or expected date of publication and name of the external consultants of all external reports commissioned by his Department since January 2012; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48878/12]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The information sought is being collated and will be sent on to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Tourism Promotion

221. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the role of the Irish Open in stimulating the tourism industry here; his plans to develop Irish golf tourism; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48996/12]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The matter raised is an operational matter for Fáilte Ireland. I have referred the Deputy's question to Fáilte Ireland for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.