

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 11, inclusive, answered orally.

Undocumented Irish in the USA

12. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his plans to discuss immigration reform with the American Government regarding the status of the illegal Irish in America. [50105/12]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): The Government continues to attach particular importance to the welfare of the Irish abroad in general and especially to the position of undocumented Irish immigrants in the United States. A resolution of the situation for undocumented Irish migrants will continue to be pursued by the Government in our ongoing contacts with the US Administration and Congress, including by myself and the Taoiseach at every suitable opportunity. The advice of Ireland's friends and contacts within the US Administration and Congress has long been that comprehensive reform of the US immigration system and procedures is likely to be the only manner by which such a resolution can be achieved. In welcoming the outcome of last week's US Presidential election, I noted that the prospects for such reform would certainly appear to have advanced as a result of President Obama having won a second term. I can assure the Deputy that through our Embassy in Washington and in close liaison with Irish-American community representatives, our contacts with the US Administration and Congress will intensify even further over the coming weeks and months with a view to ensuring that the interests and concerns of undocumented Irish immigrants are captured in any future legislative deal in this area that emerges.

I would add here that much further debate and discussion is likely to be required within the US political system as to what such a deal might comprise. It is therefore not possible at this stage to specify its contents or identify an exact timescale in which these may become clear but as I have underlined, the area will continue to receive the Government's close attention over the period ahead.

Overseas Development Aid Provision

13. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his future plans for overseas development aid in Budget 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50172/12]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): This Government is strongly committed to Ireland's aid programme. Every day it makes a real dif-

ference in the lives of millions of the world's poorest people. The programme is central to our foreign policy, has an enviable international reputation, and consistently enjoys strong political and public support. Over the past few years, and despite the very challenging fiscal position facing the Government, we have consistently maintained our level of contribution to Official Development Assistance (ODA) at above 0.5% of Gross National Product (GNP). In the current year, the Government has allocated €639 million to ODA which is expected to achieve an ODA/GNP percentage target of at least 0.5%.

This is an important and significant achievement and a very clear indication of our commitment to the aid programme, and to achieving the UN target of 0.7% of GNP. However, as I have stated on many occasions in the past, credible progress towards achieving the UN target can only be made through restoring sustainable growth in the economy. This is the Government's absolute priority and we are working extremely hard to achieve this goal.

The 2013 budget is a matter for consideration by Government.

For 2013 our focus will remain on working with some of the world poorest countries, particularly those in sub Saharan Africa. We will continue to meet the enormous challenges of reducing poverty and eradicating global hunger, working through our well established partners in the key areas of health, HIV and Aids, education and improving governance structures. We will continue to provide vital humanitarian assistance to those caught up in emergencies and crisis situations and to support the United Nations and other International Organisations in their development programmes.

This Government remains ambitious for, and committed to, the aid programme. We are determined to maintain and build on its high international reputation, and to ensure that it continues to build the foundation of real change, future prosperity and wellbeing in the lives of many of the world's poorest people.

Foreign Conflicts

14. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which he and his EU colleagues, by their own volition or in conjunction with the UN, have been in a position to influence the situation in Syria with particular reference to the identification of some means to bring about a cessation of the hostilities with a view to the possible protection of civilians; if in the course of discussions on the issue it has been found possible to take any steps which might positively influence the situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50155/12]

45. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the measures he has taken in conjunction with his EU counterparts regarding the Syrian conflict; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50188/12]

60. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which he and his EU colleagues continue to focus the ongoing situation in Syria with particular reference to identifying a means whereby the ongoing bloodshed may be brought to a halt; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50461/12]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I propose to take Questions Nos. 14, 45 and 60 together.

Ever since the Syria crisis erupted 20 months ago, Ireland has worked tirelessly together

with its EU and international partners to end the appalling violence that has so far claimed the lives of more than 20,000 people and to launch a necessary dialogue among all Syrians for a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

Since his appointment which we have warmly welcomed, UN/Arab States Joint Special Envoy Lakshar Brahimi has been engaged in extensive discussions with all the parties to the conflict as well as with the major international and regional powers, with the view to devise a way out of the current stalemate. His call for a ceasefire on the occasion of the *Eid al Adha* festival had received broad support including that of key regional players such as Egypt, Turkey and Iran as well as the backing of the UN Security Council, only for the violence to re-ignite a few hours into the truce.

Despite the *Eid* truce setback, we continue to support Mr. Brahimi's mission as there is clearly no other alternative available. I am greatly concerned by the dangers of further militarisation of the conflict and do not believe that proposals for external intervention of any sort are likely to help in any way to bring about a peaceful solution to the crisis. I fear such an intervention would only lead to an escalation of the fighting and casualties among civilian population and potentially risk spreading the conflict to the wider region. The priority must remain to secure an early ceasefire and get a political process under way.

In order to compel the Assad regime to cease oppression and violence against its own people, the EU has adopted a series of severe sanctions, including at the last EU Foreign Affairs Council meeting, which are proving effective in increasing pressure on the Syrian authorities. Yet, to be truly effective, sanctions should include a global arm embargo to cut the flow of weapons and arms making their way to Syria. For that to happen, the international community and the UN Security Council in particular should live up to their responsibilities and act decisively through adoption of an appropriately strong Council Resolution.

If a political solution to the crisis is to be successful, the Syrian opposition must do more to unite and agree on a workable programme towards political transition. So far the divisions between the internal and external opposition have only allowed Assad to maintain his no dialogue policy, arguing he doesn't have a credible interlocutor. Ireland with its EU and global partners has been particularly anxious to ensure that the Syrian opposition overcomes its divisions and I hope the latest Conference in Doha will prove a turning point in gathering the entire democratic opposition under a single umbrella and with an agreed vision and programme of action on how they see Syria's future.

We also need to continue urgently addressing the critical humanitarian situation arising from the conflict which has resulted in over 300,000 people fleeing to neighbouring countries and more than 1.5 million people internally displaced. Ireland and the EU have contributed significantly to the international efforts led by the UN in providing relief and humanitarian aid with Ireland contributing some €2.45 million to date, including €1.6 million to ICRC, UNHCR and WHO and also an additional €200,000 to UNRWA for Palestinian refugees within Syria.

Ireland and our EU and international partners will continue our strong support for all efforts to end the violence and suffering of the Syrian people and to promote the earliest possible political settlement and transition within Syria.

Overseas Development Aid Provision

15. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will provide details of the discussion he had with the President of Malawi and

the President of Mozambique; and if there will be any changes to the Irish Aid programme in these countries. [50101/12]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): My colleague the Minister of State for Trade and Development, Joe Costello, T.D., held bilateral meetings with the Presidents of Malawi and Mozambique on 16 October while he was in Brussels for the series of meetings and discussions organised by the Commission at the annual European Development Days event. Malawi and Mozambique are two of the eight priority countries for the Government's development cooperation programme, where we have a commitment to long term strategic assistance.

I am satisfied that Ireland's development cooperation programmes in Mozambique and Malawi are achieving very positive results, benefitting the poorest communities. As with all our bilateral aid programmes, these programmes are reviewed on an ongoing basis to ensure that they are making a real impact and represent value for the significant investment by Irish taxpayers.

Minister of State Costello renewed our congratulations to President Joyce Banda of Malawi on her appointment as Head of State in April, and acknowledged the efforts she has led to improve economic and democratic governance in Malawi. They discussed in particular the challenges facing almost two million people in Malawi who are currently food insecure. The President expressed her appreciation for the additional support of €1m received from Ireland to help address these immediate needs.

In his meeting with President Guebuza, the Minister of State noted that Mozambique is the largest of Ireland's bilateral aid programmes, and that remarkable economic progress is now being made in the country, despite the appalling death and destruction of the lengthy civil war which ended just 20 years ago. He outlined the thinking behind Ireland's new Africa Strategy, and discussed the opportunities which exist for increased bilateral economic links between Ireland and Mozambique. The President noted that the authorities in Mozambique looked forward to engaging with members of the Oireachtas Committee of Public Accounts when they visit in November.

Passport Statistics

16. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of persons who currently have an Irish passport. [50107/12]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): Some 4,600,399 people currently hold Irish passports.

Foreign Conflicts

17. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the steps he has taken with his EU colleagues to highlight at the UN the ongoing conflict in the Congo; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50166/12]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): The Government and our EU partners are closely monitoring the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Since the end of the all-out civil war in 2003, progress has been made in establishing a democratic system of government in the DRC. However, while much

of the country has achieved a degree of stability, several localised conflicts have continued, in particular in the east of the country. These conflicts have in many cases been characterised by an appalling degree of brutality, with large-scale attacks on the civilian population and widespread sexual violence. A large number of armed groups have based themselves in eastern DRC since the genocide in Rwanda in 1994, including Hutu extremists (FDLR) who fled Rwanda after taking part in the genocide, and Tutsi rebels (CNDP). The situation is also further complicated and destabilised by the presence of followers of Joseph Kony and his so-called Lord's Resistance Army who have moved across the borders from northern Uganda.

The latest upsurge in violence has been triggered by a rebellion earlier this year by a group known as M23, which had previously been integrated into the DRC army. The group are now attempting to establish control by armed force of a part of the territory of the eastern DRC which they are occupying.

Ireland has constantly and fully supported the actions of the United Nations to bring about peace in the DRC, including through its deployment of peacekeeping forces and the implementation of Security Council Resolutions and the work of Special Envoys and Rapporteurs, as well as through its aid programmes on the ground. In recent times, a UN Expert Panel has been working to investigate the truth of allegations that some neighbouring countries have been supporting the M23. It is important that any such support is exposed and brought to an end.

I and my EU Foreign Ministerial colleagues have discussed the situation in the DRC on a number of occasions and we will focus on it again at the forthcoming Foreign Affairs Council on 19 November.

We remain gravely concerned about the humanitarian situation in the eastern part of the DRC where well over 300,000 people have been displaced since April, and we are calling on all sides to fulfil their obligations in relation to access for the humanitarian agencies responding to the needs of the affected civilian population.

We are also supporting the efforts of regional bodies such as the International Conference for the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) to help find lasting solutions to the root causes of the conflicts in the DRC.

Overseas Development Aid Oversight

18. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will provide details on his recent trip to assess the impact of Irish Aid in Vietnam; if there will be a change of focus in Irish Aid's work in Vietnam; and the outcomes of trade talks with the Vietnamese Government. [50099/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Joe Costello): Vietnam is a priority country for Ireland's aid programme, where we have a commitment to long term strategic assistance. I visited Vietnam from 28 to 31 October to see the impact of the aid programme, to promote trade between our two countries, and to support a number of key Irish companies working in Vietnam.

I met with senior Ministers including Deputy Prime Minister Hai, the Minister for Planning and Investment, the Minister for Social Affairs, the Minister for Justice, and the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs. I held wide-ranging and very positive discussions focussing on our bilateral relations and the potential for improved trade between our two countries. I also raised our candidature for the Human Rights Council. All of the Ministers confirmed the very good bilateral relations between Ireland and Vietnam, and their desire, which I share, to further

strengthen these.

As well as completing a full schedule of meetings in Hanoi, I travelled to the province of Quang Tri in the centre of the country, to see the work of Irish Aid at first hand. I visited a number of projects, including a school and clinic in a remote area where the population belong mainly to an ethnic minority. A major focus of our work in Vietnam is with some of the poorest and most vulnerable ethnic minorities in the country, many of whom live in remote mountainous regions. The work we support in Quang Tri province provides schooling, health care and basic rural infrastructure for these communities.

I also saw the work of the Mines Advisory Group, which, with the support of Irish Aid, is helping clear the legacy of war in the province. This area still contains a large amount of unexploded ordinance, particularly from undetonated cluster munitions. To date nearly 500 dangerous areas have been identified and over 400 emergency ordinance disposal response tasks have been carried out. In view of the continuing need, I announced that Irish Aid will make a further €600,000 available over three years to support the Mines Advisory Group's work in removing unexploded bombs from villages and farmland in Quang Tri and other heavily affected provinces.

Vietnam is a country in transition, and, in addition to focusing on the needs of the poorest communities, Ireland is playing its part by providing economic expertise, and working to build stronger bilateral economic links. A major focus of our trade promotion efforts is on the education sector. I attended a prize giving ceremony in Hanoi for a major national competition, co-sponsored by the Embassy and Enterprise Ireland, which helped raise awareness of Ireland as a destination for some of the many Vietnamese students studying overseas every year.

I also hosted a networking lunch for key contacts in the education sector, which was attended by an Irish company which is helping to develop the secondary school system in Vietnam. I was Guest of Honour at a dinner hosted by ESB International to celebrate 25 years of its work in Vietnam. This provided an opportunity to showcase Ireland's achievements in the presence of the Deputy Prime Minister of Vietnam, and brought together key contacts in the rapidly growing power generation and energy sector.

I was very satisfied that our programme in Vietnam is delivering assistance where it is most needed. The current Country Strategy runs until 2015, and while subject to ongoing review and evaluation, I am satisfied that its overall focus remains appropriate. I also believe that we are making real progress in building stronger economic links with Vietnam, which has made huge progress over the past 25 years, with the potential to become a key economic partner for Ireland. I invited the Vietnamese Minister for Planning and Investment to visit Ireland and I look forward to discussions with him early in 2013 when we can further develop relations between the two countries.

Northern Ireland Issues

19. **Deputy John Browne** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on the recent North South Ministerial Council; the issues discussed; the future actions to be taken [50164/12]

25. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the specific discussions, he has had with Members of the Northern Ireland Executive or with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in relation to the potential to deepen and

broaden North/South cooperation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50194/12]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I propose to take Questions Nos. 19 and 25 together.

The fifteenth Plenary meeting of the North South Ministerial Council (NSMC) was held in Armagh on 2 November 2012. At the outset, Ministers extended their sympathies to the family of prison officer David Black who was brutally murdered on his way to work on 1 November and condemned those who carried out this atrocity. Along with our colleagues in the Northern Ireland Executive, we reaffirmed our determination that actions such as this will not be allowed to derail progress and our commitment to peace.

At the meeting, discussions covered a wide range of issues including the economic challenges faced in both jurisdictions, the work being undertaken to address the global economic crisis, challenges in the banking sector, NAMA, Corporation Tax and the opportunities for cooperation in developing trade opportunities in, and building business links, with economies such as China and India.

The benefits from maximising the potential of major tourism events including ‘The Gathering’ and Derry UK City of Culture 2013 were noted and we welcomed the major promotional campaigns for both events currently being rolled out by Tourism Ireland.

We also discussed the priorities for the upcoming Irish EU Presidency in 2013, and noted that arrangements have been put in place to enable Irish Ministers to brief their Executive Counterparts on Presidency related issues at NSMC meetings. Consideration was also given to cooperative actions during the Presidency, including possible participation by Northern Ireland Executive Ministers at Presidency-related events.

The meeting reviewed progress across a range of areas of North-South co-operation, including the work of the North-South bodies. In particular, we welcomed a number of other developments including the agreement of a timetable of milestones targeted at the facilitation of the mutual recognition of penalty points across the island and agreements reached in relation to protecting the island of Ireland from exotic animal disease incursion. We also acknowledged InterTradeIreland’s contribution to job creation.

The topic of farm safety was also raised and we expressed our sympathies to everyone who has lost loved ones in farm related accidents.

We welcomed continued progress on business planning for the establishment of the Radiotherapy Unit at Altnagelvin in Derry which will benefit patients on both sides of the border. Construction of this important facility is planned to commence in 2013 with the expectation that the Unit should be operational in 2016.

We also welcomed the establishment of the North South Inter-Parliamentary Association which held its inaugural meeting in Dublin on 12 October 2012.

We reiterated our commitment to the North West Region and noted that further discussions at official level would take place on the North West Gateway Initiative.

The potential for further developing North South cooperation has been specifically discussed with the First and Deputy First Minister. This is an area on which the Government wishes to see early progress.

Following discussion on the matter at the NSMC Plenary, we agreed that senior officials would meet and bring forward proposals on Terms of Reference Two and Three of the St Andrews Agreement Review before the end of the year.

We will continue to work with our Northern colleagues to identify additional opportunities where there is scope for further North South economic cooperation.

Dissident Republican Activity

20. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the discussions he has had with members of the Northern Ireland Executive and with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in relation to the threat of violence by persons or groups commonly referred to as dissidents; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50182/12]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): The peace process and the Good Friday Agreement have resulted in a transformation of society in Northern Ireland, perhaps most visibly in the normalisation of daily life and the dramatic decrease in terrorist-related incidents and violence. There remains, however, a threat from paramilitary groups who continue to assert their determination to impose a return to conflict on the people of Ireland. My Government colleagues and I discuss cross-border security issues and the threat posed by so-called dissident groups on a continuous basis with our partners in Northern Ireland. As co-guarantors of the Good Friday Agreement we are keenly aware of our responsibilities in this regard. Any discussion of this issue is of course overshadowed by the murder on Thursday 1 November of Prison Officer David Black. The universal condemnation from across the political spectrum in Northern Ireland and the unified reactions from the two Governments underlined the solidity of the peace process. Public statements made by the Taoiseach, Minister Shatter and by myself reinforced the message of the two Governments standing together in solidarity with Prison Officer Black's family and his colleagues in the Northern Ireland Prison Service. My colleague Minister Shatter attended Mr. Black's funeral.

I also had the opportunity to speak with Minister Ford at the North South Ministerial Council on 2 November and to convey through him my sympathies and those of the Government to his widow Yvonne and to his children Kyra and Kyle. I also discussed the matter with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when we met last Tuesday, 6 November.

In addition to discussions at political level, strong and deep cooperation exists between An Garda Síochána and the Police Service of Northern Ireland to counter such individuals and groups. The number of arrests in connection with paramilitary activity made in both jurisdictions continues to be significant. The Gardaí and the PSNI will continue to cooperate very closely to combat such activity on both sides of the border.

Foreign Conflicts

21. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the further escalation of violence against protesters in Bahrain, increased sectarian attacks and the Bahraini Government's decision to revoke the nationality of 31 dissidents; and if he has raised the issue directly with the Bahraini authorities. [50109/12]

48. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the recent actions of the Government in Bahrain who have banned all protest

gatherings, threatened to take legal action against opposition groups that organise anti-Government demonstrations and revoked the nationality of 31 opposition activists; and if he will make a

statement on the matter. [50125/12]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I propose to take Questions Nos. 21 and 48 together.

I remain very concerned about the overall situation in Bahrain and the increasing divisions in Bahraini society. This includes the recent indiscriminate bomb attack in Manama city which resulted in the deaths of two foreign workers.

I have noted the recent decision by the Bahraini Government to ban protests, which I fear is likely only to further increase tensions. The way to address the concerns of those who engage in peaceful protest and demonstrations is through dialogue and consultation. National dialogue is urgently needed in Bahrain. In all our contacts with the Bahraini authorities, including those which have taken place in the period since the ban on protests was announced, we have emphasised the need to launch a process of reconciliation. I believe this would be very much in the interests of Bahraini society as a whole.

The Bahraini authorities have committed themselves to implementing the recommendations of the Bahraini Independent Commission of Inquiry report. While I acknowledge that Bahrain has implemented some of the reforms recommended by the Commission, I believe that renewed impetus in implementing the BICI recommendations is necessary. This would help create an environment conducive to reconciliation and dialogue and enable reform and change to take place as a result of a consultative process.

I am greatly concerned by the decision of the Bahraini Government to revoke the citizenship of 31 activists, including former members of parliament. This renders some of those concerned stateless and deprives them of their most basic rights. I believe that this decision will serve only to deepen divisions and tensions in Bahraini society. I understand that the decision can be appealed through the judicial system and I hope that the individuals concerned will avail of this option and seek to have this decision reviewed and hopefully overturned. I strongly encourage the Bahraini authorities to pursue reconciliation through a genuine process of dialogue and reform.

Diplomatic Representation Issues

22. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his plans to review the Diplomatic Service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50192/12]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I keep the operation of the Diplomatic Service under constant review in order to ensure that the service my Department provides to Irish citizens, the Oireachtas and other stakeholders continues to meet the high standards they have come to expect. In that context last year, and taking into account reduced resources, significant changes were made to the structures of the Department which involved moving to a more geographic focussed structure at HQ, linking HQ and overseas missions more closely, and our Embassies taking on greater responsibility for their countries of accreditation. My Department has been implementing these changes over the past year and will continue to review the effectiveness of this new structure.

The scale and presence of the Irish diplomatic network is a matter that is kept under ongoing review in the light of changing circumstances and needs. Given the current budgetary situation, and recognising the role that our diplomatic network is playing in Ireland's economic recovery, any further adjustments to our diplomatic network will continue to be strategically focused.

Northern Ireland Issues

23. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will issue a public statement calling for the release of Marian Price in view of the fact that she has been imprisoned for 18 months without any trial date and medical reports indicate that she is not fit to attend trial. [50058/12]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): The individual referred to has been detained since 13 May 2011, following the revocation of her life licence by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. Genuine concerns have repeatedly been raised about several aspects of this case in the House on many occasions, and I have raised them very frankly with the British Government.

As the record of the House will show, I raised this case with former Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Owen Paterson on several occasions, and more recently have raised the matter with the new Secretary of State of Northern Ireland, Theresa Villiers. I know that the Taoiseach also took the opportunity to raise the matter with the Secretary of State Villiers when he met her on 2 October.

Question No. 24 answered with Question No. 10.

Question No. 25 answered with Question No. 19.

Question No. 26 answered with Question No. 9.

Trade Missions Issues

27. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will provide details on the recent trade mission that he led to Brazil; and his expectations of future bilateral relations with Brazil following his visit. [50097/12]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): President Michael D. Higgins, accompanied by my colleague, Mr Joe Costello T.D., Minister of State for Trade and Development, recently visited Chile, Brazil and Argentina. Their programme had a strong trade dimension. During the visit to Brazil, now the world's sixth largest economy, Minister Costello led an Enterprise Ireland trade mission. The President's visit to Brazil, and the accompanying trade mission, offered a valuable opportunity to raise Ireland's profile in this high growth economy, which is a priority market in the Government's Trade Strategy. Some 42 Irish businesses and third-level education institutions took part in the trade mission, spanning a wide range of sectors including telecommunications, financial services, and engineering services. Representatives of the State Agencies – Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland, Tourism Ireland, Science Foundation Ireland and Bord Bia – also participated.

The President and Minister Costello met with Irish companies and their Brazilian partners and witnessed the signings of significant contracts in the commercial and education sectors.

Two Irish companies opened new facilities, substantial new export contracts were secured by participating companies, and six Memoranda of Understanding were signed between leading Irish and Brazilian Universities and Institutions of Technology. Another key event was the launch of the participation of Irish third-level institutions in a Brazilian scholarship programme that focuses on Science and Technology. Under this programme, we look forward to up to 4,000 Brazilian students studying in Ireland at undergraduate level over the next four years, as

well as up to 1,500 post-graduate students.

The President and Minister had a very positive meeting with Brazil's President Dilma Rousseff during which they discussed the growing bilateral relationship, in particular as regards trade and education, as well as international developments. I am delighted to learn that the assessment of the accompanying Irish businesses, third level institutions and State Agencies of the official visit to South America is highly positive. My Department and our Embassy network are committed to supporting Irish companies and third level institutions to make advances in this exciting market. I welcome that both the Mayor and Governor of Sao Paulo have announced their intention of sending, respectively, a trade mission and an investment mission to Ireland in the period ahead. Our Embassy in Brazil will be following up on these and other initiatives so as to ensure that we build on the opportunities created by this extremely successful visit.

Question No. 28 answered with Question No. 9.

Departmental Staff Recruitment

29. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will provide a breakdown of the new staff recruited to work in his Department and associated agencies in 2010, 2011 and to date in 2012 by grade, location, contracted hours, full time or part time, and status permanent or temporary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50057/12]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): Details of the staff recruited by my Department during the period in question are provided in the following table:

2010

Grade	No of officers	Location	Full time / Part time	Status
Intern	7	Dublin	Full time	Temporary
Special Adviser	1	Minister's Office	Full time	Temporary
Third Secretary	9	Dublin	Full time	Permanent
Third Secretary	1	Limerick	Full time	Permanent

2011

Special Adviser	3	Tánaiste's Office	Full time	Temporary
Personal Assistant	2	Tánaiste's Office	Full time	Temporary

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Personal Secretary	1	Tánaiste's Office	Full time	Temporary
Special Adviser	1	Minister of State Creighton's Office	Full time	Temporary
Personal Assistant	1	Minister of State Creighton's Office	Full time	Temporary
Personal Secretary	1	Minister of State Creighton's Office	Full time	Temporary
Civilian Driver	2	Minister of State Creighton's Office	Full time	Temporary
Personal Assistant	1	Minister of State O'Sullivan's Office	Full time	Temporary
Personal Secretary	1	Minister of State O'Sullivan's Office	Full time	Temporary
Civilian Driver	2	Minister of State O'Sullivan's Office	Full time	Temporary
Personal Assistant	1	Minister of State Costello's Office	Full time	Temporary
Personal Secretary	1	Minister of State Costello's Office	Full time	Temporary
Intern	7	Dublin	Full time	Temporary
Junior Professional Intern – development	4	Limerick	Full time	Temporary
Junior Professional Intern – development	1	Dublin	Full time	Temporary
Junior Professional Intern – development	3	Missions abroad	Full time	Temporary

2012

Junior Professional Intern – development	10	Limerick	Full time	Temporary
Junior Professional Intern – development	2	Dublin	Full time	Temporary

Junior Professional Intern – development	5	Missions abroad	Full time	Temporary
Intern	11	Dublin	Full time	Temporary
Press Officer – Irish Aid	1	Dublin	Full time	Permanent
Administrative Officer	10	Dublin	Full time	Temporary for EU Presidency
Clerical Officers (temp)	8	Dublin	Full time	Temporary for EU Presidency

In addition, temporary clerical officers were recruited on short-term contracts in 2010, 2011 and 2012 - 125 officers this year - for the Passport Service to enable it to cope with the increase in demand for passports during the peak application period. There are no State agencies under the aegis of my Department.

EU Presidency Expenditure

30. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his priorities for the Irish Presidency of the EU Council; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50175/12]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): The jobs and growth agenda remains the main priority of Ireland’s upcoming Presidency of the Council of the European Union. Tackling the effects of the financial crisis will remain an important challenge for the Union, but the focus must now shift to creating the conditions for economic recovery and job creation. Delivery on concrete initiatives, building on the Compact for Jobs and Growth is a core objective of our Presidency. During the next six months as Presidency, Ireland will also work to make progress on measures aimed at strengthening internal and external trade. A strong emphasis will be attached to enhancing the EU’s trade links with the third countries to facilitate and increase EU exports, and to boost levels of Foreign Direct Investment into the EU.

Ireland will host an informal Ministerial meeting during its Presidency focussed on EU-US trade and we hope to advance a mandate for EU-US trade negotiations. Within the EU, the Presidency will work intensively to better equip the single market to deal with rapidly growing sectors of the economy, including the digital economy. Ireland will work across a number of Councils during its Presidency to advance dossiers to stimulate growth in the digital economy in areas ranging from Cyber security, to e-Identification, and from Data Protection and to high-speed broadband rollout. Ireland will also host the annual Digital Assembly in June 2013. Fighting unemployment, and particularly youth unemployment, will also be a major priority of the Presidency and will be the main focus of a meeting of Employment and Social Affairs Ministers in Dublin next February. The Minister for Education and Skills has also made the promotion of greater access to skills and training a major priority including through reaching agreement on the “Erasmus for All” programme.

Ireland will make sure that we use our Presidency to identify and stimulate areas of the economy that have the potential to deliver sustainable future growth and smarter jobs. For this reason the Presidency will work to make progress on reaching agreement on the EU’s Horizon 2020 framework programme for research and innovation. A further priority will be sharpening European competitiveness by working to complete the European Research Area. A number

of conferences will be held during the Presidency in the innovation area, aimed at ensuring broader participation, including by SMEs, in the Union's future research funding schemes. But Europe's economy can only grow and develop if there is stability and consumer, business and investor confidence grows. The Presidency will work to restore stability by managing the effective implementation of the EU's economic governance measures, and in particular the European Semester process. This, combined with existing EU programmes including the European 2020 Strategy, provides a blueprint for economic reform and growth. The Presidency will also work intensively to restore confidence to the EU's financial services sector through building agreement on the Banking Union proposals. The Irish Presidency will work hard to ensure that the EU has a budgetary framework in place to support economic recovery, through programmes that range from Horizon 2020 to a reformed Common Agriculture and Common Fisheries Policies, that includes cohesion funding to supporting regional growth. Ireland will also place a strong emphasis on reaching agreement on the marine "Blue Economy", and promoting growth in areas including fisheries, marine biotechnology and coastal region tourism. The Presidency will give a strong priority to securing adoption of the Action Plan under the EU's Atlantic Strategy.

I look forward to the Irish Presidency programme being published later this year. Throughout November members of the Government will continue to meet with EU partners and with several delegations from the European Parliament for discussions in preparation for Ireland's Presidency.

EU Presidency Expenditure

31. **Deputy Joe Higgins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the cost to the State of hosting the Presidency of the EU. [44571/12]

32. **Deputy Seamus Kirk** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the budget for the Irish Presidency of the EU Council; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50177/12]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I propose to take Questions Nos. 31 and 32 together.

An overarching focus of the Government in planning for Ireland's Presidency of the Council of the European Union during the first half of 2013 is to run an efficient and cost-effective Presidency. The Government decided in December 2011 to allocate a budget in the order of €60m over 2012 and 2013 to resource the Presidency, which excludes security costs. This budget is broadly in line with budgets for recent Presidencies and is less than the cost of the Irish Presidency in 2004 when taking all expenditure into account, the total cost was an estimated €110m.

An effectively managed Presidency will deliver long-term reputational benefits for Ireland. Short-term benefits include significant stimulus for the local economy from an influx of up to 15,000 delegates, press and representatives of NGOs who will use local services including hotels, restaurants, taxis etc. over the six month Presidency period. The use of Dublin Castle and a small number of other state-owned venues mainly in Dublin to host most Presidency meetings will reduce venue hire, transport and set-up costs, not to mention significantly reducing the "carbon footprint" of the Presidency.

The procurement of most logistical requirements for the Presidency is being centralised to reduce costs, reduce administrative burden, and increase efficiencies. Procurement is being

carried out on a collaborative basis involving principally my Department, the Department of the Taoiseach, the National Procurement Service and the Office of Public Works. Purchasing is being conducted in a transparent and competitive basis in compliance with relevant EU and national rules.

Trade Missions Issues

33. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will provide details of the recent trade mission that he led to Malaysia; and the expected economic outcomes of the trade mission. [50098/12]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): The Minister of State for Trade and Development, Joe Costello, TD, made an official visit to Malaysia from 24-28 October. This was followed by a visit to Vietnam from 28-31 October. Malaysia is a priority market under the Government's Strategy and Action Plan for Irish Trade, Tourism and Investment to 2015 which sets out the overarching framework for rebuilding and repositioning Ireland for strong export-led growth. In 2011, Malaysia was Ireland's 6th largest trading partner in Asia with merchandise trade valued at €694.51 million. Exports were valued at €463.39 million; imports at €228.15 million. The Minister's visit took forward bilateral consultations which I held with my counterpart the Malaysian Minister for Foreign Affairs during his visit to Ireland in March 2012.

While in Malaysia, the Minister was invited to attend the Asia Pacific Ireland Business Forum and delivered the keynote address. This Business Forum brought together some 200 business leaders from leading Irish and international companies throughout the region and was focused on opportunities for expanding trade and investment links between Ireland and Asia. A number of Irish Ambassadors and representatives from the State Agencies were invited to and also participated in the Forum.

In addition to participating in the Business Forum, Minister Costello also undertook a range of engagements in Malaysia. These included meetings with his counterparts in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Trade. The Minister marked also the 25th anniversary of ESB International's presence in Malaysia, and met the Irish Chambers of Commerce from the region. Minister Costello visited the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland campus at Perdana University, where Malaysian students follow the RCSI syllabus. Finally, Minister Costello attended the annual Asian Gaelic Games in Kuala Lumpur, which featured the participation of 1,000 players and supporters from across Asia and the Gulf region.

This visit provided a significant opportunity to focus attention on the growing trade and investment opportunities which exist in a key regional market, as well as to engage further with important interlocutors to further enhance Ireland's bilateral relations with Malaysia. Together with my colleagues, I am committed to deepen engagement with Malaysia, to encourage the growing Irish presence in Malaysia, and to expand links with the Malaysian and wider business community in the ASEAN region notably in the education and tourism sectors.

Economic Policy

34. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will outline any expected economic benefits arising from the Africa Ireland Economic Fo-

rum hosted by his Department; and his plans to increase trade with Africa in 2013. [50102/12]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): In September 2011, I launched the new Africa Strategy of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade at the first Africa Ireland Economic Forum in Dublin. The Strategy builds on Ireland's longstanding relationship with Africa, based on political support and the Irish people's commitment to working to end poverty and hunger in some of the poorest countries on the continent. It explicitly recognises the role which greater economic and trade cooperation can make to relations between Ireland and Africa, and to development in Africa. The second Africa Ireland Economic Forum was held in Dublin on 22 October 2012. It was attended by over 250 people, including representatives from 160 Irish companies as well as officials and business representatives from 25 African countries. The theme of the Forum was "Building on Success" and participants heard from a wide range of Irish businesses who have successfully engaged in the African Market. I addressed the Forum and held discussions with many of those present, from Ireland and from Africa. I am confident that the Forum and the work of my Department and our Embassies abroad are giving added impetus to the development of trade and investment between Ireland and Africa.

A recent study by Barclays Bank of 200 companies in Ireland has found that some 91% of respondents believe that there is untapped potential for Ireland in Africa. These findings echo the reports from our eleven Embassies in Africa which all report increased interest in bilateral trade between Ireland and Africa. I visited a number of African countries earlier this year and was impressed by the rapid pace of change at a political and economic level and the strong entrepreneurial spirit that I witnessed. We will continue to pursue a strong trade promotion agenda in key growth markets across Africa in the coming months. This week the Minister of State for Trade and Development, Joe Costello T.D., is travelling on trade promotion business to South Africa and Nigeria, two markets where Irish exports increased in 2011 by 9% and 40% respectively. He will also travel with officials from Enterprise Ireland and Bord Bia on the first ever trade focussed visit from Ireland to Ghana.

International Relations

35. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade in view of the increased support for Catalan self-determination, if he supports the right of the Catalan people to self-determination within the European Union. [50093/12]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): It is a matter for the people of any country of the European Union to establish the arrangements for their own democratic governance and it would not be appropriate for me to comment on that process in any one country.

Military Neutrality

36. **Deputy Patrick Nulty** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade when the programme for Government commitment to discontinue the use of Shannon Airport by the United States military will be implemented; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48507/12]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): No

commitment has been made in the Programme for Government to discontinue the use of Shannon Airport by the United States military. What the Programme states is that “we will enforce the prohibition on the use of Irish airspace, airports and related facilities for purposes not in line with international law”. Arrangements for the overflight and landing of US military aircraft at Shannon Airport have been continuously in place under successive Governments for over fifty years. There are no plans to change these arrangements, which are fully consistent with Ireland’s obligations under successive Resolutions of the UN Security Council.

Nuclear Proliferation

37. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the measures he has taken in conjunction with his EU counterparts regarding Iranian efforts at nuclear armament; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50189/12]

49. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the recent comments of the Israeli Prime Minister that he is ready to order a unilateral strike on Iran; his views on the possible implication of these comments. [50096/12]

57. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will support a peaceful resolution to the Iran, Israel and USA disagreement on nuclear power and weapons. [50458/12]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I propose to take Questions Nos. 37, 49 and 57 together.

The EU and others have been engaged for almost eight years in efforts to negotiate with Iran a solution to the issues surrounding Iran’s nuclear programme. The EU High Representative, Cathy Ashton, has led negotiations for the E3+3 group (UK, France, Germany, US, Russia and China) with Iran at three negotiating sessions this year, as well as a number of ancillary meetings.

I am satisfied that the EU, along with its other partners, is doing everything it can to encourage Iran to change its course and to negotiate seriously so as to address the major concerns existing regarding its nuclear programme. Regrettably, this has included the necessity to impose several rounds of EU sanctions. A further round of sanctions was agreed at the Foreign Affairs Council in October.

The E3+3 have shown both great patience and creativity in seeking every avenue for agreement. I believe that there are those in Iran who also wish to reach agreement. However, the regime as a whole has thus far regrettably failed to respond and engage in serious negotiation. I very much hope that they will do so soon. Following the US election, it is likely that a fourth round of talks may be convened in the next few months. But if Iran shows no willingness to negotiate, further meetings are likely to serve little purpose. Ireland has shared the widespread international concerns about the nature of Iran’s nuclear programme. These concerns are felt most strongly by other states in the region, not confined to Israel alone. There can be no doubt that this issue has increased instability and could even conceivably lead to conflict in an already very troubled region.

Israel in particular has stated clearly that it considers itself actively under threat from Iran. It points to statements about Israel by Iranian leaders, Iran’s supplying of rockets to militant

groups who use them to attack Israeli civilians, and alleged Iranian involvement in terrorism against Israelis in other countries. Israel has stated that it will not accept Iran developing a nuclear weapon, and is prepared to use military force to prevent this. I am aware that both Israeli and Iranian leaders have sometimes used directly threatening language, for either domestic or external effect. I have made clear our view that an attempt by any country to resolve this issue by military means could be hugely destabilising in the Middle East and lead to unknown consequences.

I will continue, as I have always done, to advocate strongly that the issues arising in connection with Iran's nuclear activities can only be resolved through diplomatic negotiations and not by any other means.

Diplomatic Representation Issues

38. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his plans to establish a greater diplomatic presence in Asia and Africa, particularly due to the trade remit of his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50193/12]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): Ireland's diplomatic network includes 56 Embassies, 7 multilateral Missions and 10 Consulates General and other offices overseas. In addition to their country of primary accreditation, many Ambassadors are also accredited to additional countries on a non-resident basis which enhances the cost-effectiveness of our external representation. Our missions abroad perform a wide range of functions in pursuit of Ireland's foreign policy interests. These include representing and advancing government policies with other States and in international organisations, in particular the EU and the UN; economic and cultural promotion; frontline consular and passport services to Irish citizens overseas; engaging with Irish communities and harnessing the resource they offer in assisting economic recovery; and programme management, particularly in Irish Aid priority countries.

Our Embassy network works very closely with the State Agencies which have a remit for the promotion of Irish trade, tourism and inward investment - Enterprise Ireland, Bord Bia, Tourism Ireland and IDA Ireland - and other relevant Departments in assisting Irish producers to find and access new markets, including in Asia and in Africa, where the Government is pursuing a new long-term strategy involving a more mature partnership based on shared political, developmental, economic and trade objectives.

The scale and deployment of our diplomatic network is considered by the Government on an ongoing basis. Any decision to adjust the State's external representation by closing, opening or relocating missions, will have regard to national priorities and available resources.

Question No. 39 answered with Question No. 10.

Ministerial Meetings

40. **Deputy Michael Colreavy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will provide details of the discussion he had with the EU Humanitarian Commissioner and the EU Development Commissioner regarding Ireland's proposed programme of work during our Presidency of the EU Council. [50100/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Joe Costello): A key factor in running a successful Presidency in the area of development cooperation is the building of strong relationships with the EU institutions - the European External Action Service, the European Parliament and the Commission. Over the past six months, I have held extensive discussions with the institutions, and especially with Development Commissioner Piebalgs and Humanitarian Commissioner Georgieva.

I met with Commissioner Piebalgs when I attended the Foreign Affairs Council in Brussels in May and our discussions focused on early planning for Ireland's EU Presidency. I emphasised that we were working to ensure that the fight against hunger, which is a cornerstone of Ireland's aid programme, featured strongly in our Presidency programme.

The main development cooperation priority of Ireland's Presidency will be to ensure that the EU engages actively and coherently in the September 2013 Special Event on the Millennium Development Goals, to be held at the UN in New York. The UN Special Event will consider the progress to date on the Millennium Development Goals and will be an opportunity for world leaders debate for the first time the shape of the post-2015 global development framework.

Commissioner Piebalgs and I agreed on the importance of a substantive discussion on the issues

involved at the informal meeting of EU Development Ministers which will be held in Dublin on 11/12 February 2013.

When I attended the development segment of the Foreign Affairs Council in Luxembourg on 15 October, I met both Commissioner Piebalgs and Commissioner Georgieva, and updated them on Ireland's Presidency work programme. I also informed the Commissioners that Ireland will host an International Conference on Hunger, Nutrition and Climate Justice in Dublin on 15/16 April 2013.

Ireland's Presidency will also seek to promote efforts to link relief, recovery and development by forging stronger links between the development and humanitarian agendas of the European Union. This was the main focus of my discussions with Humanitarian Commissioner Georgieva. We have recognised for some time that building the resilience of vulnerable people to natural and man-made disasters and creating greater links between our humanitarian and development activities is a vital component of development work. I welcomed the Commission's recent Communication on Resilience, issued jointly by both Commissioners, and stressed that I looked forward to building on it during Ireland's Presidency.

Commissioner Georgieva and I also discussed how legislation to establish a European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps can be progressed in the first half of 2013 and the Commissioner expressed her support for the volunteering initiative which we are working on in Ireland, including our focus on the contribution which recently retired public servants can make in developing countries.

Both Commissioners have expressed strong support for our approach to the EU Presidency. I have arranged a further meeting with Commissioner Piebalgs later this month to review our preparations and I look forward to welcoming both Commissioners to the informal Development Ministers' meeting in Dublin in February.

Diplomatic Representation Issues

41. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has reviewed the proposals from the Irish Exporters Association to reallocate Irish embassy resources from Europe to parts of Africa, Asia and South America in order to help increase exports to those regions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49973/12]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I am, of course, aware of the proposals referred to by the Deputy. The size, scale and distribution of Ireland's diplomatic network is kept under review by my Department and considered by the Government on an ongoing basis. Any decision to adjust the State's external representation by closing, opening or relocating missions must be made having regard to clear national priorities and available resources and on the basis of an anticipated and ongoing significant return for the State. Our diplomatic and consular missions abroad perform a wide range of functions in pursuit of Ireland's foreign policy interests, such as: representing and advancing government policies with other States and in international organisations, in particular the EU and the UN; trade, economic and cultural promotion; frontline consular and passport services to Irish citizens overseas; engaging with Irish communities and harnessing the resource they offer in assisting economic recovery; and programme management, particularly in Irish Aid priority countries. While these functions do not apply equally to all missions - missions to international organisations, for example, have no direct trade promotion functions – and the priority assigned to each function in specific countries is not constant, Ireland's economic and political interests abroad are best advanced by optimal allocation to all these functions of the overall resources available. This allocation must, as I have said, reflect national priorities, available resources and anticipated and ongoing return to the State.

As the Deputy is aware, the Government's Trade Strategy covers both established Irish markets in North America and in the European Union and emerging and high growth markets on other continents where our economic engagement is at a lower level but has strong growth potential. My Department, including its overseas missions, works very closely with the State Agencies charged with promoting Irish trade, tourism and inward investment and with other relevant Departments in assisting Irish companies to find and access new markets abroad.

Local market teams chaired by the local Ambassador and comprising representatives of the locally based State Agencies have been established in all the priority markets, both established and emerging or high growth markets, identified under the Trade Strategy. These teams' detailed market plans, as well as their mid year and end year progress reports, are submitted to the Export Trade Council, which I set up last year to monitor implementation of the Trade Strategy and which has met on three occasions under my Chairmanship. I am familiar with the competing claims on resources of established versus emerging markets. The Chief Executive Office of the Irish Exporters Association is a member of the Export Trade Council. In this context and more generally, my Department engages actively with the IEA. My view at this time is that Ireland has to do more with less across both established as well as emerging markets and I will ensure that my Department's external resources are deployed to the best advantage of the full range of Ireland's interests.

EU Presidency Expenditure

42. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which, in the course of Ireland's Presidency of the EU, he expects to be in a position to influence the thinking among his EU colleagues and their colleagues in their respective national parliaments towards a rediscovery of the original European ideals and visions of

solidarity, collegiality, unity of purpose and commitment to a common goal; if in the course of Ireland's Presidency, it might be possible to focus on such issues with a view to bringing about a situation whereby each nation within the Union takes ownership of the projects and commits itself to the fundamental principles; if it might be possible to establish a forum made up of all the stakeholders with the objective of identifying weaknesses in the existing structures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50154/12]

58. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which he and his Department respond to the sometimes negative criticism directed at this country by a minority of EU national parliaments with a view to ensuring collegiality, support and solidarity in the context of the European project and that members of national parliaments recognise the need to take ownership of the European project as opposed to generating negativity; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50459/12]

59. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he sees it as a priority during Ireland's Presidency of the EU to initiate a programme of information for the membership of national parliaments with the objective of generating a unified approach to issues currently affecting the EU; and if he will make a statement on the

matter. [50460/12]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I propose to take Questions Nos. 42, 58 and 59 together.

Ireland will hold the Presidency of the European Union for the seventh time during the first half of 2013. This Presidency will also coincide with the 40th anniversary of Ireland's accession to the European Union.

As in the past, our overriding objective will be to demonstrate that Ireland is a strong supporter of the European project and a committed member that is capable of contributing to progress on the EU's wide agenda. Next year we will follow the guiding principle that governed our six previous Presidencies by seeking to deliver an efficient, impartial and results-driven Presidency. My ministerial colleagues and I look forward to working closely with our counterparts in Council and the European institutions to deliver concrete initiatives and real added value for all the citizens of the Union. We will adopt a constructive and pragmatic approach to these engagements during our Presidency. I know that this House will follow a similar example in its relations with other national parliaments.

The Lisbon Treaty recognises the contribution of national parliaments to the good functioning of the EU through their scrutiny of draft legislative acts, including checking for compliance with the principle of subsidiarity, and through their participation in inter-parliamentary co-operation between national parliaments and the European Parliament. This is facilitated by all member state national parliaments having at least one representative based in Brussels.

There is an established trend, particularly since the Lisbon Treaty, for national parliaments of the country holding the Presidency to host a number of interparliamentary conferences as part of the "parliamentary dimension" of the Presidency. For example, the Houses of the Oireachtas will host eight such meetings from January to June 2013, including the Conference of Speakers of EU National Parliaments, Conference of EU Affairs Committees of National Parliaments, Interparliamentary Conference on CFSP/CSDP and the Interparliamentary Conferences of Sectoral Committee Chairs.

2013 will also mark the European Year of citizens. During our Presidency we will work

across all Council formations to make progress on a range of policy and legislation that better serves the needs of citizens across the EU.

The Government also sees the need to raise awareness of the wide range of rights we enjoy as EU citizens and to encourage greater engagement by citizens in the EU decision-making process, particularly as the Union takes further steps towards closer integration. Coinciding as it does with the 40th anniversary of our accession to the EEC, the European Year of Citizens also provides the opportunity for public reflection here in Ireland on four decades of EU membership.

To this end, the Government is planning a range of events for next year under the broad rubric of Communicating Europe. We intend to hold a public event in early January, a Citizens' Dialogue, to mark the launch of the European Year of Citizens. This will provide a forum for a representative cross-section of citizens to voice their views, with participation by senior political figures both at national and European level. A number of similar meetings are planned in other Member States. We also intend to hold a series of regional Town Hall meetings as well as a conference in Dublin during Europe Week in May 2013 on the broad theme of the EU and the citizen. The overall aim will be to encourage grassroots citizen engagement in EU affairs.

United Nations Resolutions

43. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will support the upcoming UN resolution on observer state status for Palestine, which is likely to occur this month; and if he has discussed this resolution with other EU States. [50106/12]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): It is expected that the UN General Assembly may be asked to vote, perhaps as early as this month, on a resolution to admit Palestine as an 'Observer State' at the UN. This would be less than full membership but an advance on Palestine's current status, that of an observer organisation. This move has long been anticipated. A draft resolution to that effect has just been circulated among Missions at the UN, although this may yet be subject to amendment. While consultations are ongoing among EU Member States on how to respond to the draft Resolution, I have already indicated that we would be willing to support a resolution which was reasonable and balanced, and which recognised clearly the need to restart political negotiations aimed at a final and comprehensive peace agreement.

Question No. 44 answered with Question No. 10.

Question No. 45 answered with Question No. 14.

Humanitarian Access

46. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the situation of the town of Bani Walid in Libya where the conditions for the civilian population are grave and where many believe there is a pending humanitarian disaster; if he will call for international pressure on this issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50198/12]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): The recent violence which engulfed the city of Bani Walid and claimed up to thirty lives was gravely

worrying. The fighting broke out when the authorities attempted to arrest militants alleged to have captured and tortured Omran Shaaban, the rebel fighter credited with Gaddafi's capture. Given the large number of people killed -- many of them civilians -- during the fighting and the widespread damage to the city, it is very important that there be a thorough investigation by the Libyan authorities into the events that took place and that, where clear evidence of criminal activity or serious human rights offences is discovered, those responsible are held to account. A degree of stability has now been restored and the residents have begun to return to their homes. Basic services are returning to close to normal levels, and schools are beginning to re-open after the fighting. The UN has provided teams to help assess the humanitarian needs in Bani Walid and to assist the Libyan authorities in clearing munitions. The Libyan authorities have also pledged to provide financial support to residents to re-build their homes damaged during the fighting.

The violence in Bani Walid was indicative of the serious security challenges facing the Libyan Government. The new Libyan government led by Prime Minister Zidan, which took office last week, faces a momentous challenge in imposing its authority on the myriad of militias vying for power. Militants seized control of the parliament building only days after the new Cabinet was approved in protest at the inclusion of some Ministers with links to Gaddafi. The first priority for the new government should be to restore the rule of law and to improve the

security situation.

I met with the then Libyan Foreign Minister during the UN General Assembly. He briefed me on the steps being taken to disarm the militias and to integrate the militias into a national army. There is no doubt that Libya faces a long and what will no doubt often prove a difficult road towards building democratic and legitimate state institutions. I believe, however, that it will overcome these challenges. Ireland, along with its EU partners, stands ready to provide assistance to the Libyan authorities in all relevant spheres, including security sector reform, capacity-building and public administration and the promotion of human rights. The EU is also continuing to consult with the Libyan authorities about the possibility of launching a civilian CSDP mission to help the Libyan authorities improve border security.

Illegal Israeli Settlements

47. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he is satisfied with EU action regarding the implementation of measures to stop illegal Israeli settlements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50190/12]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I have stated previously in the House that I believe that Israel's policy of relentless settlement expansion is now the major obstacle to achieving peace in the Middle East. It is, accordingly, inimical to the real interests of Israelis and Palestinians alike. Many injustices and humiliations, furthermore, are visited upon Palestinians as a consequence of this policy. I am satisfied, however, that the EU is taking important steps both to achieve a halt to the settlement expansion and to tackle the range of settlement-related issues which have become sources of conflict in their own right. In the Conclusions of the May 2012 Foreign Affairs Council, which Ireland played an active role in achieving, the Council focussed attention specifically on these issues on the ground, which include expropriations, demolitions, movement restrictions, settler violence, water and planning issues and economic development. The Council underlined the damage caused by these issues and called urgently for changes of Israeli policy in the Occupied Pales-

tinian Territory.

I will be seeking a further Council discussion in the near future to follow up on these Conclusions and to examine in particular whether there has been any improvement in Israeli policies relating to these issues. If there has not been, and I have to say I am unaware of any such improvement, I hope that the Council will consider adopting stronger measures.

Question No. 48 answered with Question No. 21.

Question No. 49 answered with Question No. 37.

Question No. 50 answered with Question No. 10.

EU Presidency Issues

51. **Deputy Joe Higgins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the discussions and meetings he has had with other EU leaders in preparation for Ireland's Presidency of the EU in 2013. [49711/12]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): As we approach January 2013 and Ireland's Presidency of the Council of the European Union, there has been discussion at all of my recent meetings with partners on our Presidency agenda. At all meetings I have emphasised that the main focus of the Irish Presidency will be on measures to create jobs and growth in Europe. I have also taken the opportunity to discuss the busy foreign policy agenda that Ireland, working closely with the European External Action Service (EEAS), will face during its Presidency in 2013. I have also discussed our emerging objectives in the General Affairs Council which I will chair during our Presidency.

At the beginning of October, the Taoiseach and I led the Government in a meeting with the College of European Commissioners in Brussels to discuss the emerging themes and priorities for the Presidency. We were pleased with the outcome of the meeting which confirmed that there is broad agreement between the Government and the European Commission on the principal priorities and objectives that Irish Ministers have identified for the Presidency at this stage of planning. I have also held discussions with Catherine Ashton, the High Representative for Foreign Affairs, on plans for Ireland's Presidency and in particular the Foreign Affairs Council agenda.

That same week I met Martin Schulz, President of the European Parliament, during his visit to Ireland. We had a useful and constructive discussion and I stressed the high importance that the Irish Government attaches to maintaining strong working relations with the European Parliament. Last month, I also met the French, Norwegian and German Foreign Ministers, the Danish European Affairs Minister and addressed a meeting of the Secretaries General of EU Foreign Ministries that was held in Dublin in advance of the Presidency. On the margins of the Tripartite Social Summit I met Vice President Šefčovič and Commissioner Lewandowski. These meetings also focussed, to a large extent, on issues that will be to the fore during our Presidency. Last Friday I met the British Deputy Prime Minister where we had useful bilateral discussions on a number of issues including European issues and our forthcoming Presidency.

Departmental Staff Recruitment

52. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the progress made to date in relation to the appointment of a chief risks officer and a professionally qualified head of finance in his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50250/12]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): My Department takes the issue of risk extremely seriously. A risk register is maintained by a risk group chaired by an Assistant Secretary. In addition, risk is reviewed at monthly meetings of the Management Committee. The Department also has professionally qualified staff employed in its Finance sections. The Department's Audit Committee has nevertheless recommended that the Department appoint a dedicated Chief Risk Officer and a professionally qualified Chief Financial Officer. The Audit Committee recommends that these officers be appointed at Assistant Secretary grade. The ability of the Department to respond to this proposal has been limited by the embargo on public service recruitment necessitated by the need to reduce government expenditure.

Last June, following the publication of the Audit Committee's most recent annual report, the Secretary General of my Department invited the Audit Committee to meet with the Management Committee to discuss these proposals. This meeting took place this week, following which the Management Committee, with my support and encouragement, accepted the recommendations of the Audit Committee. An appropriate member of the Management Committee will assume the additional responsibilities of Chief Risk Officer and sanction is being sought from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform for the recruitment of a professionally qualified Chief Financial Officer who will sit on the Management Committee.

Overseas Development Aid Oversight

53. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the type of support and assistance given relating to transparency and accountability that facilitated the recent disclosure on aid to Uganda. [50252/12]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): Ireland has been working for many years to assist the office of the Auditor General in Uganda. Building the capacity of key financial oversight institutions in our partner countries is an essential component of our aid programmes. In Uganda, we have increased our support to these key institutions in recent years to ensure that the systems through which Government deliver development programmes, are more accountable. In 2011, €1.3m was provided to support financial oversight institutions in Uganda, including within the Ministry of Finance, Parliament, the National Procurement Agency and the Office of the Auditor General. Ireland has been working with and assisting the office of the Auditor General as an inherent part of our programme in Uganda. The Auditor General has also visited Ireland to look at our systems of accountability. His recent report into the handling of aid funds by the Office of the Prime Minister has found that funding of €12.6 million received from Ireland, Norway, Sweden and Denmark last year was transferred to unauthorised accounts, of which the Irish Aid component is €4 million. The support provided by Ireland has enabled the Auditor General's Office to build the skills and capacity required for the conduct of complex investigations such as this.

While the findings of the Auditor General in this case are deeply disturbing, the fact that the Auditor General is now in a position to make them is a demonstration of the increased capacity

and determination of elements within the Ugandan administration to enforce accountability for the use of government and donor money. It is only by building national accountable systems such as this that corruption can be eliminated. Depending on the decisions on the future of our development cooperation programme in Uganda I would hope to continue our assistance to the Office of the Auditor General to ensure that he has the appropriate resources to continue his essential work.

Overseas Development Aid Provision

54. **Deputy Derek Nolan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will provide an update on the implementation of the Africa strategy which was announced last year; the measures in place to ensure that this strategy will work to its full potential; if any Irish business has expressed an interest in engaging with the strategy; if it will just apply to Irish Aid programme countries; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50231/12]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I launched the new Africa Strategy of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in September 2011. A progress report on its implementation was presented by the Minister of State for Trade and Development, Joe Costello T.D., at the second Africa Ireland Economic Forum, which took place in Dublin on 22 October 2012. The progress report details the measures which have been put in place over the past year to ensure the successful implementation of the Strategy, and also outlines my Department's plans in respect of the Strategy for the next twelve months. I have arranged for a copy of the report to be placed in the library of the Houses of the Oireachtas. We have received strong interest from across the Irish private sector in engaging with the Africa Strategy. Representatives from 160 Irish companies attended the Africa Ireland Economic Forum on 22 October, as well as officials and business representatives from 25 African countries. The Forum featured a wide range of Irish businesses which have successfully engaged in the African market. I addressed the Forum and held discussions with many of those present, from Ireland and from Africa. My Department has also consulted widely with the private sector over the past year as part of the review of the Irish Aid White Paper, and also at a number of trade promotion events focused on Africa that we have held this year.

The Africa Strategy is being driven in Africa through our network of eleven Embassies and through our Honorary Consuls. We have also stepped up our bilateral engagements with African leaders since the launch of the Strategy, including during my visit to a number of African countries earlier this year to foster opportunities for greater economic and political cooperation. This week the Minister of State for Trade and Development is travelling on trade promotion business to South Africa and Nigeria, two markets where Irish exports increased in 2011 by 9% and 40% respectively. He will also travel with officials from Enterprise Ireland and Bord Bia on the first ever trade focussed visit from Ireland to Ghana.

Consular Services Representations

55. **Deputy Jerry Buttimer** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of requests for consular assistance received by each of the State's diplomatic missions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50299/12]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): Over the last decade, the number of Irish citizens travelling abroad has increased dramatically, there

were over 6.2 million visits abroad by Irish residents in 2011. As the number of Irish citizens travelling and living abroad continues to rise, so also does the need for consular assistance and support. In 2011, this Department assisted almost 1,500 Irish citizens following serious consular emergencies overseas, including deaths, arrests, kidnaps, accidents, child abductions and hospitalisations. While Consular assistance was provided to Irish citizens in virtually every country in the world, by far the highest number of consular emergencies occurred in Spain, followed by Australia, US, Britain, Thailand, France, Portugal, Poland, Turkey, the Netherlands, Canada, Germany, Italy, New Zealand, Greece and the United Arab Emirates. The Department provided consular assistance to the families of almost 200 people who died abroad and dealt with nearly 300 cases of arrest, as well as a number of child abduction cases.

Also 2011 was an exceptionally busy year as we responded to crisis situations in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Bahrain and Syria as well as to the earthquakes in New Zealand and Japan. Hundreds of Irish citizens and their families were advised, assisted and helped to leave these areas of conflict or natural disaster.

Ireland has 66 bilateral diplomatic and consular Missions and 96 Honorary Consuls in 58 countries around the world. Together with the Headquarters based Consular Assistance Section, they are available to provide consular assistance and advice to our citizens in need abroad and their families in Ireland.

Overseas Development Aid Provision

56. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will provide details of the names of the non-governmental organisations that receive funding towards overseas development aid from his Department and or Irish Aid in 2011; the amount paid to each NGO; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50434/12]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): The Government's aid programme, which is managed by Irish Aid in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, is sharply focused on the fight against global poverty and hunger. Our partnership with Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) represents a very important element in this effort. About a quarter of Ireland's development assistance is channelled through development Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). In accordance with the objectives of the aid programme, this funding is provided to support the long term development work carried out by NGOs in developing countries as well as emergency humanitarian assistance and development education programmes. The partnership between Irish Aid and NGOs is strategically directed with a particular focus on the poorest and most vulnerable communities.

Significant NGO recipients include Concern, Trócaire, GOAL, Self Help Africa, Irish Fair Trade Network, Christian Aid, Oxfam Ireland, World Vision, Action Aid and Plan Ireland. The main payments made to NGOs from Irish Aid funding schemes at headquarters are set out in Annex 18, pages 89-92 of the Irish Aid Annual Report 2011, which is available on the Irish Aid website. I will ensure that a copy is sent to Deputy O'Donovan .

Additional funding is provided to NGOs from the development programmes in the nine priority countries for Irish Aid where we have a commitment to long-term strategic assistance. Furthermore, a small grants programme is administered by ten Embassies accredited to countries in which Irish Aid does not have a bi-lateral development co-operation programme.

Question No. 57 answered with Question No. 37.

Questions Nos. 58 and 59 answered with Question No. 42.

Question No. 60 answered with Question No. 14.

Overseas Development Aid Provision

61. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which the countries worldwide now deemed to be the top ten world's poorest countries; the extent to which the international community continues to engage in a co-ordinated effort to address the situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50462/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Joe Costello) : Since the Millennium Development Goals were agreed by global community in 2000, the number of people living in extreme poverty has fallen significantly – including in sub Saharan Africa where rates were highest. Since this time many more children have access to safe water; more girls and boys are attending school, and far fewer people are dying of preventable illness such as malaria and HIV. Much of this progress is attributed to the positive impact of international development assistance.

These achievements, however, are unequally distributed across the world. Countries, such as Haiti, Sierra Leone and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, have the highest proportion of the population living below the poverty line in the world, and the least stable economic, health and education systems. In these situations the presence of extreme poverty usually coincides with significant obstacles, including limited resources, disease, famine and war.

There is a recognition that, in the future, international development assistance has to be increasingly targeted at those countries where rates of poverty are highest and where least progress has been made since the launch of the Millennium Declaration in 2010.

At a major international conference on development in Busan, Republic of Korea in 2011, the international community signed up to a 'New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States'. It calls for a country-led vision and plan which donors should use to coordinate their support. This will reduce duplication of effort and ensure that resources get to those who need them most.

The OECD has recognized that Irish Aid, the official aid programme of the Irish Government, is sharply focused on the needs of the poorest countries of the world and allocates a far greater proportion of its assistance to least developed countries in Sub Saharan Africa, than other bilateral donors. The recent national consultations for the Review of the White Paper on Irish Aid indicated that Irish people wanted this sharp focus on the needs of poor countries and communities, to continue in the future.

Ireland is fully supportive of this new international focus on countries where limited progress has been made in addressing poverty and disadvantage. The Government is committed, in the context of our preparations for the Presidency of the European Council in 2013, to highlight the development needs of fragile states and to ensure the particular needs of the world's poorest countries are prioritized at the United Nations Review of the Millennium Development Goals, in September 2013.

Foreign Conflicts

62. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and

Trade the degree to which the EU and the UN continues to monitor the situation in the western Balkans with particular reference to the need to ensure continued stability and progress through democracy in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50463/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Joe Costello): On 10 October the European Commission published its annual Enlargement Strategy including Progress Reports on each of the countries of the Western Balkans. The substance of the reports will be discussed by the General Affairs Council and European Council in December. The decisions reached by the Council will shape the agenda on the EU's enlargement policy during Ireland's Presidency in the first half of 2013.

On the positive side, the Commission's assessment noted that further progress had been achieved in the Western Balkans in the last year in particular with regard to regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations. Nevertheless it recognised that issues stemming from past conflicts, together with other open bilateral issues remain key challenges to stability in the Western Balkans and need to be urgently addressed.

The EU has been active in seeking innovative approaches to dealing with difficult situations or blockages in the accession process. In the course of 2012 the Commission has launched a High Level Accession Dialogue with Macedonia; worked closely with the government and opposition in Albania to overcome political obstacles to further electoral and parliamentary reforms; launched a High Level Dialogue on the Accession Process with Bosnia and Herzegovina; and launched a Structured Dialogue on the Rule of Law with Kosovo. High

Representative Ashton and the European External Action Service continue to facilitate a Dialogue between the governments of Belgrade and Pristina in an effort to improve relations between their two countries.

Despite positive progress in most of the region, the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina has stalled in recent months. The International High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, Valentin Inzko, presented his six-monthly report to the UN Security Council on the implementation of the Dayton Peace Accords on 8 November. In it he noted that the political dynamic in Bosnia and Herzegovina during this reporting period had stagnated. The Commission similarly

noted that there had been limited progress towards meeting the political criteria for EU accession. Campaigning for the local elections held on 7 October diverted political attention away from the pressing reforms needed. It is to be hoped that with the elections complete the government can give renewed attention to these outstanding issues.

Foreign Conflicts

63. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which he, in conjunction with colleagues at EU and UN level, continues to identify and address areas of conflict, ethnic cleansing and or human rights abuses worldwide; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50464/12]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): Addressing human rights concerns, including conflict, ethnic cleansing and or human rights abuses, remains central to our foreign policy. With its EU partners, Ireland closely monitors the human rights situations in many countries, including post-conflict countries, throughout the world. We do this on the basis of information obtained from a variety of sources, including

both official channels and non-governmental/civil society organisations. Where and when the situation warrants, we make known our concerns about human rights violations to the Governments in question.

Ireland supports the use of the full UN human rights machinery in responding to human rights abuses, including supporting the role of UN Human Rights Treaty Monitoring Bodies, Special Procedures and Mandate Holders and the convening, where appropriate, of Special Sessions of the UN Human Rights Council. At the UN, the EU regularly makes statements on the human rights situations in a number of countries from all regions. Ireland is fully associated with these statements.

Ireland has been a consistent and strong supporter of the International Criminal Court, recognising it as an essential means of combating impunity for the most serious violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law.

The Government is committed to the promotion of full observance of universal human rights standards. Active participation in multilateral organisations including the EU, UN and the Council of Europe provides an opportunity for Ireland to voice its concerns regarding human rights abuses. Through these organisations, international pressure can be brought to bear on those responsible for violation of human rights. Ireland will continue to use these mechanisms as a means of highlighting violations of human rights and furthering their protection.

Middle East Peace Process

64. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will indicate the extent to which he continues at EU and UN level to focus attention on the ongoing situation in the Middle East with particular reference to addressing the complaints on all sides in their respective areas of concern, whether a particular permanent structure exists whereby ongoing grievances can be dealt with; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50465/12]

65. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which attention continues to be focused at international level in the matter of achieving progress on the Palestinian-Israeli issues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50466/12]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I propose to take Questions Nos. 64 and 65 together.

With regard to the prospects for on Palestinian-Israeli issues, I refer the Deputy to my reply to Question 7 (50191/12) earlier today.

In relation to the question of a permanent structure, I would refer him to my reply to him in response to Question 70 (45233/12) on 17 October, which included the following: “I do not think there is any lack of a forum for the parties to express their grievances, rather the opposite. I know the idea of a secretariat has been suggested occasionally in the Oireachtas, but I have to say that in my meetings with the parties both in the region and elsewhere, no-one has ever suggested this to me. There are already permanent representatives and staffs operating in the field on behalf of the EU, the US, the UN and the Quartet. The problem is not one of a lack of structures, but a lack of political will to use them.”

Human Rights Issues

66. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which the international community continues to monitor the situation regarding alleged human rights abuses in Iran; the progress that has been made to date on such issues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50467/12]

68. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which the international community continues to monitor the persecution of academics in Iran; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50469/12]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I propose to take Questions Nos. 66 and 68 together.

The human rights situation in Iran is profoundly disturbing, and the period since the Presidential election of 2009 has been characterised by an intensification of human rights abuses on many fronts. Although it is difficult to gain reliable statistics and information on human rights abuses in Iran, there are a number of reputable and thorough sources and reports, such as the reports of the UN Rapporteur on Human Rights in Iran, through which governments can monitor the human rights situation in Iran. It is clear from these sources that the deterioration of the human rights situation in Iran continues to be a grave concern.

The Iranian authorities continue to deny civil and political rights in Iran, including in relation to freedom of expression and assembly, arbitrary arrest, and torture and other cruel treatment in detention. This highly targeted repression has been particularly stringent against not only academics but also members of Iran's religious and ethnic minorities, political activists, journalists and bloggers, human rights defenders and members of the legal profession in Iran who represent clients detained by the authorities. These actions are in clear violation of Iran's international obligations under the International Covenant for Civil and Political Rights, of which Iran is a signatory. I would also condemn the ongoing detention under house arrest of the two leading opposition politicians, Mir Hossein Moussavi and Mehdi Karroubi, who contested the 2009 presidential election against President Ahmadinejad.

Ireland will co-sponsor a General Assembly resolution, due to be voted on later this month, expressing the international community's deep concern at the human rights situation in Iran, and calling upon the Government of Iran to take a number of specific and urgent steps to improve the situation, including ending the harassment, intimidation and persecution of among others students and academics. The Resolution also calls upon the Government of Iran to provide unfettered access for the Special Rapporteur to carry out his mandate. On March 22 this year, Ireland co-sponsored the UN Human Rights Council's Resolution on Iran, which welcomed the report and recommendations of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran and expressed serious concern at the developments noted in that report, as well as the lack of access permitted to the Special Rapporteur.

The EU has also repeatedly raised human rights issues in contacts with the Iranian authorities and adopted a travel ban and asset freeze against those responsible for grave human rights violations in April last year, further extended to additional persons last October. This sends an important political signal to those in the judicial system and elsewhere in the Iranian regime who perpetrate human rights abuses. I fully support the strong Conclusions on human rights in Iran issued by the Foreign Affairs Council in October last year. Ireland will continue to be

active at EU level in pressing for stronger EU action in relation to the human rights situation in Iran.

At a bilateral level, my Department engages in ongoing dialogue with the Iranian Ambassador and his Embassy on these issues. My officials regularly hold meetings with the Ambassador to convey our grave concerns at the human rights situation in Iran. Ireland will continue to raise human rights in Iran, bilaterally and at the EU and UN, at all appropriate occasions.

Overseas Development Aid Provision

67. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the degree to which he continues to galvanise support for the alleviation of starvation, strife and famine in the Horn of Africa; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50468/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Joe Costello): One year on from the devastating famine and food crisis which killed tens of thousands of people across the Horn of Africa, the humanitarian situation across much of the region remains extremely fragile. While a huge relief effort, followed by good rains last autumn, saved hundreds of thousands of lives, the crisis forced many more from their homes, devastated their livelihoods and left them vulnerable to future hunger shocks. In many areas, the tentative progress made thus far risks being undermined by further external shocks, such as another poor rainy season or a later than usual harvest.

Gripped by drought and racked by conflict for over twenty years, Somalia was the epicentre of last year's crisis and in late 2012, remains by far the worst-affected country in the region. The Tánaiste's visit to Mogadishu this summer, one of very few by senior international politicians in recent times, brought into sharp focus the continuing and critical nature of the humanitarian situation. The Tánaiste highlighted the need for sustained and properly targeted assistance to what remains, recent media attention notwithstanding, one of the world's most significant 'forgotten emergencies'. The visit also underlined Ireland's commitment to continuing to support progress towards peace and stability in Somalia and to supporting development and resilience-focused programmes, whilst continuing to meet humanitarian needs. Indeed, and as the Tánaiste underlined in his own recent speech to the UN General Assembly in New York, the visit reinforced the Government's ongoing determination to work closely with our partners in the UN at EU level to highlight forgotten crises and the needs of fragile states, such as Somalia.

In terms of direct humanitarian funding and assistance to date in 2012, Ireland has provided just under €6 million in emergency funding to address the humanitarian needs caused by the ongoing insecurity and food crisis in Somalia. Elsewhere in the Horn of Africa, Ireland has provided a further €1.3 million in humanitarian assistance to partners operating in Ethiopia as well as some €900,000 in support for agencies providing direct relief to drought-affected communities in Kenya.

In addition to this humanitarian assistance, Ireland also maintains a major bilateral development programme with Ethiopia, one of the countries most affected by last year's crisis and where chronic food insecurity remains a major issue. This is the rationale behind Ireland's ongoing support for the Productive Safety Nets Programme, which provides money or food to some of the poorest people in that country, in return for participation in a public works scheme which benefits local communities. Building on lessons learned from Ireland's ongoing support for this and other similar initiatives, the Government will, in the months and years to come, continue to increase its focus on helping people to become more self-reliant and less dependent

on humanitarian aid.

Finally at international level, the Government remains actively involved in pushing for humanitarian and relief efforts in the Horn to be closely tied to work to build the resilience of vulnerable communities across the region. We will continue to champion these efforts in the context of our forthcoming EU Presidency in the first half of 2013.

Question No. 68 answered with Question No. 66.

Undocumented Irish in the USA

69. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which any progress has been made in the matter of undocumented Irish in the US; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50470/12]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I am hopeful that the outcome of last week's US Presidential election will advance the prospects for the necessary reform of US immigration systems and procedures that would help improve the situation of undocumented Irish immigrants in the United States. Much further debate and discussion is likely to be required within the US political system as to what such reform might comprise. Through our Embassy in Washington and in close liaison with Irish-American community representatives, our contacts with the US Administration and Congress will intensify even further over the coming weeks and months with a view to ensuring that the interests and concerns of undocumented Irish immigrants are fully reflected in any future legislative deal that emerges in this area. A resolution of the situation for undocumented Irish migrants in the US will also continue to be pursued by myself and the Taoiseach at every suitable opportunity.

Foreign Conflicts

70. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which the situation in Sudan and neighbouring jurisdictions continues to be monitored by the international community; the extent to which this has had a positive bearing on the situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50471/12]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): The situation in Sudan and South Sudan continues to be a matter of major concern for Ireland and our EU partners. The EU is working closely with the wider international community, including within the United Nations and with the African Union and neighbouring countries in the region, to exert pressure on the Governments in Khartoum and Juba. We are pressing them to implement fully the terms of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement concluded in advance of South Sudan's independence and to resolve outstanding issues through peaceful and inclusive dialogue.

There have been some positive developments in recent weeks, notably the conclusion of nine agreements between Sudan and South Sudan on 27 September following a prolonged Summit meeting between Presidents Bashir and Kiir in Addis Ababa. These agreements cover oil revenue distribution and other important economic and security matters. However, a number of unresolved issues remain, and, if not addressed, they have the potential to lead to renewed con-

flict. Ireland and the EU fully support the work of the African Union High Level Implementation Panel, led by former South African President Thabo Mbeki, which is leading international mediation efforts in the region, guided by the terms of UN Security Council Resolutions. The Panel has made proposals for ways to resolve remaining disputed issues between the two countries, notably on the status of the Abyei region, and the EU is calling upon the two Governments to engage in a constructive process to reach agreement on these outstanding issues.

A very serious concern is the continuing conflict in the regions of Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile where there has been a serious humanitarian crisis. We are calling for all parties to fulfil their obligations under international humanitarian law in terms of protecting civilians and allowing humanitarian access for aid agencies and workers. We are also calling for negotiations between the combatants to resolve outstanding political and security issues.

Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe

71. **Deputy Eric Byrne** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade in his role as chairman in office of the OSCE if he will outline the rationale behind his decision to appoint Walburga Hapsburg Douglas as head of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly delegation to the Ukrainian Electoral Observation Mission with special responsibility to lead the short term observation mission; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50472/12]

72. **Deputy Eric Byrne** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if the appointment of Walburga Hapsburg Douglas to lead the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly delegation to the Ukrainian Electoral Observation Mission is a new departure in election monitoring; if he will outline the status of Walburga Hapsburg Douglas vis-à-vis the role of Ambassador Audrey Glover; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50473/12]

73. **Deputy Eric Byrne** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the person who instructed or took the decision which lead to the visit by the head of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly Walburga Hapsburg Douglas to visit the leader of the Ukrainian opposition in prison; if he will confirm if this visit was supported by the OSCE/ODIHR core team which is led by Ambassador Audrey Glover; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50474/12]

74. **Deputy Eric Byrne** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the name of the official who is spokesperson for the OSCE Election Observation Mission in the Ukraine; if he will confirm if it is Ambassador Audrey Glover or Walburga Hapsburg Douglas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50475/12]

75. **Deputy Eric Byrne** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the fact that 45 out of 67 OSCE/ODIHR Electoral Observation Mission LTO teams monitoring the Ukrainian election found that the campaign environment was fair overall and if his attention has been drawn to the fact that polling and counting of votes was also deemed to be overwhelmingly fair and transparent; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50476/12]

76. **Deputy Eric Byrne** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if, in his role as chairman in office of the OSCE, his attention has been drawn to the various diverse positions being taken by international bodies in relation to the Ukrainian parliamentary elections; if his attention has further been drawn to the findings of the European Academy of Electoral Observation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50477/12]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I propose to take Questions Nos. 71 to 76, inclusive, together.

Election observation has been a key component of the work of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) since 1990, when the Office for Free Elections was established by the Paris Summit of the CSCE – the OSCE’s predecessor. The Office for Free Elections was renamed as the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) in 1992 and ODIHR’s role in comprehensive election monitoring has been enhanced over the years, notably at the Istanbul Summit in 1999.

In 1997, a Cooperation Agreement on election activities was concluded between the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (OSCE PA) and the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), reflecting a desire to avoid overlap, redundancy, unnecessary expense and confusion between the two OSCE institutions. The 1997 Cooperation Agreement provides inter alia for exchange of information, participation by the Parliamentary Assembly in Needs Assessment Missions, common briefings and de-briefings and logistical support to Parliamentary Assembly short-term observers. In accordance with the Cooperation Agreement, the OSCE Chairman-in-Office may designate a political figure as a Special Coordinator to lead the short-term OSCE observer mission. This political figure should normally be the President of the PA or an OSCE PA senior official recommended by the PA in consultation with the Chairman-in-Office. Among the key duties of the Special Coordinator is to deliver the preliminary post-election statement, in conjunction with other relevant figures.

The Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions is normally issued at a press conference on the day after an election, and is based on the work of the entire Election Observation Mission (EOM), including both the long-term and short-term observation components. While the OSCE PA has reserved the right to issue its own independent statement after elections, the usual practice in recent years has been for joint statements, reflecting not only the views of ODIHR and the OSCE PA but often including other election observation bodies, such as the European Parliament (EP), the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) or the NATO Parliamentary Assembly (NATO PA).

At the request of the Ukrainian Government, an OSCE/ODIHR EOM was deployed to observe the Parliamentary Elections in Ukraine, which took place on 28 October 2012. The EOM opened in Kiev on 12 September, led by Ambassador Audrey Glover of the United Kingdom. It consisted of a 20-member core team of experts from 14 OSCE participating States, 90 long-term observers and 600 short-term observers requested from OSCE participating States.

On 10 August 2012, in line with the Cooperation Agreement and at the request of the President of the OSCE PA, I appointed Ms Walburga Habsburg Douglas of Sweden, Vice President of the OSCE PA and Head of the OSCE PA delegation, as Special Coordinator. Her function, as indicated above, was to lead the short-term OSCE observer mission and deliver the Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions. The appointment of a Special Coordinator was in line with the practice for all other EOMs during the Irish Chairmanship of the OSCE, and recent practice during previous Chairmanships.

The Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions issued on 29 October found that the Ukrainian parliamentary elections were characterised by a lack of a level playing field and that certain aspects of the pre-election period constituted a step backwards compared with recent national elections. The campaign environment was assessed as not fair overall by 22 of the 45

OSCE/ODIHR EOM long-term observer teams. While election-day was assessed to be calm and peaceful overall, and voting and counting were assessed mostly positively, the tabulation process was assessed negatively, as it lacked transparency. In the Post-Election Interim Report issued by ODIHR on 9 November, it is reported that tabulation was negatively assessed in 77 of the 161 District Election Commissions (DECs) and that approximately 25 DECs observed in the days after the election experienced serious problems with tabulation due to irregularities and other issues. The OSCE/ODIHR is expected to issue a comprehensive final report, including recommendations for potential improvements, in the coming weeks.

The 14-page Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions was agreed by the OSCE/ODIHR, the OSCE PA, the EP, PACE and the NATO PA, the result of a common endeavour involving 802 observers from 42 countries, observing at 2,521 polling stations. I note that many other bodies also deployed smaller teams to observe the elections, including the European Academy for Election Observation (EAEO). While I am unable to comment on the individual assessments made by other organisations or their methodology, I can confirm that I have the fullest confidence in the election observation methodology used by OSCE/ODIHR, which is widely recognised as the gold standard in election observation activities and is consistent with the UN Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation and the related Code of Conduct for International Election Observers.

As regards the attempt by Ms Walburga Habsburg Douglas to visit Yulia Tymoshenko, leader of a political party which gained significant representation in the recent elections, this was a decision in which the Irish Chairmanship was not involved. Nevertheless, following the refusal to grant access to Ms Tymoshenko, I was in contact with the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, Kostyantyn Hryshchenko, to outline my concern at the cancellation of visiting rights. I am not aware of any involvement by Ambassador Glover or the OSCE/ODIHR Core Team in the attempt to visit Ms Tymoshenko.

Election Monitoring Missions

77. **Deputy Eric Byrne** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the recent statement made by the Attorney General of Texas who stated that overseas election monitors from agencies such as the OSCE were liable to be arrested in the state of Texas in the pursuit of their duties; if he will outline, even at this stage, the results of the OSCE observation mission to the USA; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50478/12]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): At the invitation of the United States Government, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) deployed a Limited Election Observation Mission (LEOM) for the General Elections of 6 November. The LEOM, which deployed on 3 October, was led by Ambassador Daan Everts of the Netherlands and included 13 core team experts, based in Washington D.C., and 44 long-term observers, deployed to 40 locations throughout the country. The role of the LEOM, as with all election observation missions, was to assess the elections for their compliance with OSCE commitments and other international standards for democratic elections, as well as national legislation. As a participating State in the OSCE, the United States has committed itself to conducting elections in line with OSCE standards and inviting international election observers. ODIHR has assessed elections in the United States on five previous occasions, since 2002. Observers followed campaign activities, the work of the election administration and relevant federal and state institutions, implementation of the legislative framework,

and the resolution of election disputes.

The mission met with representatives from relevant federal and state authorities and political parties, as well as with candidates, and with representatives from the judiciary, civil society and the media. As part of the observation, the LEOM conducted comprehensive monitoring of the media. In line with ODIHR's methodology for limited election observation, the mission did not carry out systematic or comprehensive observation of the voting, counting, and tabulation on election-day. However, Mission members visited a number of polling stations across the country to follow election-day procedures.

On 23 October, in an open letter to Ambassador Everts, the Attorney General of Texas, Greg Abbott, stated that OSCE representatives were not authorised by Texas law to enter a polling place. He indicated that it might be a criminal offence for OSCE representatives to maintain a presence within 100 feet of a polling place in Texas and that failure to comply with these requirements could subject the OSCE's representative to criminal prosecution for violating state law.

On 24 October, the Director of ODIHR, Ambassador Janez Lenarčič, expressed his grave concern over the threat of criminal prosecution of OSCE/ODIHR election observers. The ODIHR Director wrote to United States Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, noting that the threat of criminal sanctions against OSCE/ODIHR observers was unacceptable and that the United States, like all countries in the OSCE, had an obligation to invite ODIHR observers to observe its elections. He stressed that any concerns or reports that the election observers intended to influence or interfere with the election process were groundless, underlining that OSCE/ODIHR election observers adhered to all national laws and regulations, as well as a strict code of conduct.

A Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions of the LEOM was issued on 7 November. It noted that election observation in the United States was regulated by State law, which generally did not provide for international observers, as was required by paragraph 8 of the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document. It further noted that OSCE/ODIHR observers were not provided with full and unimpeded access to polling stations in several States, including Texas, and that observers were publicly threatened with criminal sanctions if they entered polling stations. This was in contravention of paragraphs 8 and 10 of the 1990 Copenhagen Document.

More generally, the Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions assessed that the elections took place in a pluralistic environment and were administered in a professional manner. Election day was calm and although most voters were generally able to cast their vote without difficulty, there were reported instances of long queues and shortages in polling station staff. Overall, the elections enjoyed the trust of the majority of stake-holders, although shortcomings were identified in areas such as voting rights, accuracy of voter lists, campaign finance transparency and recount procedure. It was also reported that decisions on technical aspects of the electoral process were often unduly politicised, and the absence of a federal election management body with oversight responsibility was noted. A final report on the observation of the entire electoral process will be published in the coming weeks.

The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (OSCE PA) also deployed a short-term observer mission to the general elections in the United States, led by João Soares of Portugal, whom I appointed as Special Coordinator for the short-term observer mission. The OSCE PA deployed a total of 100 observers in Washington D.C. and four of the 50 federal States. In its preliminary post-election statement, the OSCE PA lauded the professionalism of the election authorities, while pointing to capacity problems at some polling stations. After a generally peaceful but highly polarised campaign, voters were given a genuine opportunity to make an informed

choice. The OSCE PA expressed particular concern about the role of unlimited private campaign financing and the decentralised and highly diverse electoral system, which continues to lack country-wide standards, creating vulnerabilities in the system. The OSCE PA will issue its final report on the elections at its Bureau meeting on 5 December.

Public Sector Reform Review

78. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of bodies that have been abolished or amalgamated by his Department out of the list of bodies listed in the public service reform document of 17 November 2011; the savings or cost of this in 2012; the projected savings or cost of this programme in 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50540/12]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): A decision on the future of DEAC will be made in the near future when the Review of the White Paper on Irish Aid is finalised.

Departmental Staff Promotions

79. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of promotions made in his Department to principal officer higher scale, principal officer standard scale, assistant principal officer higher scale, assistant principal officer standard scale, higher executive officer scale, executive office scale and staff officer scale; the total for all of his Department; if he will provide a breakdown for for 2009, 2010, 2011 and to date in 2012; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50977/12]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): Promotions in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade have been relatively few since the introduction of the moratorium by the Government with effect from 27 March 2009, with any exceptions requiring the specific approval of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform. In the period since then the Department’s core staffing decreased by approximately 190, or about 12%. Predictably, senior levels were most severely affected and, in the circumstances, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform recently approved the filling of some of the critical gaps that had arisen at these levels, particularly since the end of the pensions “grace period” on 29 February 2012. In the period under reference there have also been a number of up-gradings to higher scales in line with the terms of local bargaining agreements between various unions and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform under the Programme for Competitiveness and Work, 1994-1997. Full details are set out in the following table. In each case, the rules of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform governing pay-on-promotion were followed in determining the new scale point and increment date.

2009 Promotions

Number	From grade	To grade
5	Third Secretary	First Secretary
2	Higher Executive Officer	Assistant Principal Officer
1	Executive Officer	Higher Executive Officer
3	Clerical Officer	Staff Officer

2009 Up-Grades

Number	From grade	To grade
1	First Secretary	AP1
2	Third Secretary	Third Secretary Higher
2	Executive Officer	Executive Officer Higher

2010 Promotions

Number	From grade	To grade
Nil	-	-

2010 Up-Grades

Number	From grade	To grade
1	Third Secretary	Third Secretary Higher
1	Executive Officer	Executive Officer Higher
1	Clerical Officer	Clerical Officer Higher

2011 Promotions

Number	From grade	To grade
Nil	-	-

2011 Up-Grades

Number	From grade	To grade
1	Third Secretary	Third Secretary Higher
1	Executive Officer	Executive Officer Higher
1	Clerical Officer	Clerical Officer Higher

2012 Promotions

Number	From grade	To grade
5	First Secretary	Counsellor
7	Third Secretary	First Secretary

2012 Up-Grades

Number	From grade	To grade
3	Counsellor	PO1
8	First Secretary/APO	AP1
1	Third Secretary	Third Secretary Higher

Bank Debt Restructuring

80. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Finance if he will quantify the amount of risk that was transferred from the German sovereign exchequer by way of risk attaching to financial institutions that had ultimate recourse to the German sovereign exchequer in the event of failure, to the Irish sovereign Exchequer by means of bank guarantee given by the then Government on 28 September 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[50548/12]

81. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Finance if he will report on any independent estimates that have come to the attention of his Department, indicating the amount of risk that was transferred from the German sovereign exchequer by way of risk attaching to financial institutions that had ultimate recourse to the German sovereign exchequer, in the event of failure, to the Irish sovereign Exchequer by means of the bank guarantee given by the then Government on 28 September 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50549/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 80 and 81 together.

To answer the Deputy's questions would necessitate an ability to identify those holders of securities guaranteed by the Irish Government, who were financial institutions with recourse to the German sovereign for support.

I refer the Deputy to my previous reply on 13 November 2012 which outlined the difficulties in establishing the identity bondholders in such a circumstance.

With respect to any independent estimates of such a situation, I do not consider that such estimates could be reliable, given the difficulties that those who have prepared those estimates would similarly have in establishing the identity of bondholders.

I confirm again that neither the banks nor the Government have an accurate means of establishing the underlying ownership of securities issued by the banks under the ELG as of a particular point in time. As these securities are freely tradable once issued it is not possible to trace their ultimate ownership. These securities are traded and dealt through market participants and settled by clearing house systems. An issuer does not have any access to the records of the clearing house. At maturity, the Bank will instruct its paying agent to transfer the funds due to the clearing house who will then distribute the funds to the holders of the securities as per their records. Even where the bank is presented with lists alleging to represent names of bondholders I am informed there is no way for the bank or anyone else to completely verify the accuracy of such lists..

Budget 2013

82. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Finance the number of meetings he or his officials have attended in relation to budget 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45669/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Budget 2013 is the culmination of a year long budgetary process. The development of the Budget consists of many important elements, including the publication of the Stability Programme Update and the Medium-Term Fiscal Statement. Regarding the Budget, meetings take place throughout the year between my officials and officials of other organizations, such as the NTMA, the Revenue Commissioners and other Government Departments, most notably the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. Suffice to say, there would be a huge quantity of meetings held in relation to the Budget. It would be extremely difficult for my Department to accurately estimate the total number of meetings that I or my officials have attended in relation to Budget 2013.

In addition, I am able to inform the Deputy of a small sample of Pre-Budget meetings with external representative groups that I have attended personally over the past number of days.

These include meetings with ICTU, IBEC, the IFA, the Construction Industry Federation, the Irish Creamery and Milk Suppliers Association and the CVP (Community and Voluntary Pillar, an umbrella body representing 17 organisations in the voluntary sector: Social Justice Ireland, Age Action Ireland, SVP, etc.) all of which I attended with my colleague, the Minister of Public Expenditure and Reform.

Furthermore, I have individually attended Pre-Budget meetings with external representative groups over the same short time period with the Vinters' Federation of Ireland, the Irish Road Haulage Association, Retail Ireland, and the CCAB-I, which is an umbrella body for accountancy organisations.

Universal Social Charge Payments

83. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of universal social charge paid per week and per annum by a person on the minimum wage salary. [50204/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The amount of Universal Social Charge payable per week and per annum by a person on the minimum wage, aged less than 70 and not in receipt of medical card is €10.51 per week and €546.74 per annum.

Computation

Individual earning the minimum wage, aged less than 70 and not in receipt of a full medical card.

Income	€17,542
Universal Social Charge	
€ 5,980 @ 4%	= €239.20
€10,036 @ 2%	= €200.72
€ 1,526 @ 7%	= €106.82

Computation

Individual earning the minimum wage and in receipt of a full medical card.

Income	€17,542
Universal Social Charge	
€10,036 @ 2%	= €200.72
€ 7,506 @ 4%	= €300.24

Promissory Note Negotiations

84. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance the progress made in negotiations on a deal to restructure the Anglo promissory notes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50297/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As the Deputy is aware, the Irish Government has been working extremely hard to secure a deal on the Irish bank debt and detailed

work will continue to ensure that the positive moves in Europe are harnessed to maximise the benefit to the Irish taxpayer. This is on the back of the Euro Area summit statement of 29 June of this year and the on-going work is one of the Government's key priorities. A significant item on the agenda in all discussions is the issue of the promissory note. I am glad to say that we meet with strong appreciation of our situation and we are able to have very constructive dialogue on our approach to this question. As discussions are on-going, it is not possible at this point to give a more detailed update or guide on the potential timing of any agreed approach but we will be continuing our engagement with the troika and our partners in the European Union with a view to a satisfactory resolution of this issue and other related questions.

Bank Debt Restructuring

85. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the impact of the recent statement by the Ministers for Finance from Germany, Finland and the Netherlands on the separation of bank and Government debt on efforts to reduce Irish bank debt; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50298/12]

99. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Finance if the timing of the forthcoming elections in Germany are influencing the timeline of when Ireland's debt issue will be examined by the EU; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47315/12]

103. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Finance the reason Ireland is a special case in relation to dealing with our legacy debt; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48330/12]

107. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Finance if he will respond to the statement made by German Minister Wolfgang Schäuble, Finland's Jutta Urpilainen and Dutch Minister Jan Kees de Jager following a meeting in Helsinki on 25 September; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41634/12]

108. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Finance if he will discuss the statement made by German Minister Wolfgang Schäuble, Finland's Jutta Urpilainen and Dutch Minister Jan Kees de Jager following a meeting in Helsinki on 25 September at the upcoming European Council meeting on 18 and 19 October 2012; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41635/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 85, 99, 103, 107 and 108 together.

As I have said previously, the statement by the three Finance Ministers of Germany, Netherlands and Finland on 25 September addressed issues already decided upon by Eurozone leaders when they met in Brussels on 29 June. At that time, the Heads of State or Government stated "that it is imperative to break the vicious circle between banks and sovereigns" and that "the Eurogroup will examine the situation of the Irish financial sector with the view of further improving the sustainability of the well-performing adjustment programme."

The European Council on 18-19 October subsequently reaffirmed that "the Eurogroup will draw up the exact operational criteria that will guide direct bank recapitalisations by the European Stability Mechanism (ESM), in full respect of the 29 June 2012 euro area Summit statement. It is imperative to break the vicious circle between banks and sovereigns."

Ireland is a special case due to the unique circumstances behind our banking and sovereign debt crisis and the fact that our banking crisis emerged at a time when the full range of European

mechanisms were not available to us.

The Taoiseach and Chancellor Merkel spoke together following the October European Council. They reaffirmed the commitment from June 29th to task the Eurogroup to examine the situation of the Irish financial sector with a view to further improving the sustainability of the well performing adjustment programme. They recognised, in this context, that Ireland is a special case, and that the Eurogroup will take that into account.

The key timeline in regard to the realisation of these commitments is the establishment of the Single Supervisory Mechanism and not elections in any Member State. It is only once this has been put in place that the ESM will be in a position to recapitalize banks directly. It is expected that this will not be completed before the second half of next year.

Pensions Levy Issues

86. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the possibility of imposing a levy or tax on the pension sums of more than €100,000 administered to former employees of banks only covered by the State guarantee; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50319/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As the Deputy will be aware, it is 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.

Tax Reliefs Application

87. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Finance the number of businesses that have availed of tax relief on research and development as outlined in the Finance Bill 2012; the way this compares to 2010 and 2011; if there are available statistics on the benefit of the scheme; if it is due to be increased in 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50320/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that the total number of companies benefiting from the research and development tax credit for 2010, the latest year available, was 1,172 at an estimated Exchequer cost of €224 million. I should highlight that these are provisional figures. Corresponding data cannot yet be provided for 2011 and 2012 as the tax returns for those years are either not yet due or are still being processed. Therefore it is not possible to provide the comparison requested by the

Deputy.

Regarding the benefits of the current R&D scheme, the purpose of the scheme is to encourage R&D and innovation to be carried out in Ireland with a view to encourage the productive, high value-added sectors of our economy. Regarding any changes to the R&D tax credit, I am unable to comment at this time, but all options will be considered as part of the regular process for Budget 2013.

Ministerial Meetings

88. **Deputy Shane Ross** asked the Minister for Finance the number of meetings he has had with the public interest directors of the banks, individually and collectively, since he became Minister for Finance; the dates of these meetings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50429/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The primary duty and responsibility of the public interest directors as well as all the other directors is to ensure that the institution on whose board they serve is run properly and appropriately. The responsibility of public interest directors under company law is to the institution on whose board they serve. I work with these covered institutions through the chairpersons of the boards and that is my primary point of contact. I don't specifically meet with Public Interest Directors appointed to the covered institutions. Public interest directors do not have a formal reporting relationship to the Minister or to the Department of Finance. I have, however, met with a Public Interest Directors on a number of occasions as follows: 05 May 2011: Meeting with AIB Directors Mr Dick Spring & Mr Declan Collier

17 May 2011: Meeting with Permanent TSB Directors Mr Ray MacSharry and

Ms Margaret Hayes.

13 September 2011: Meeting with AIB Director, Dr Michael Somers*

* Dr. Michael Somers is a Government Nominee (not a Public Interest Director)

As Minister for Finance, I am strongly committed to ensuring that the boards of the covered institutions act at all times in a manner fully consistent with key public interest objectives for the banking sector. In normal course I would meet with the Chairpersons and Chief Executive Officers of each covered bank.

Tax Yield

89. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Finance the total payments to the Exchequer resulting from the carbon tax in each of the years since its introduction to date; if he will provide a breakdown of the energy sources oil, gas and so on from which tax revenues have been collected; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50435/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that the total payments to the Exchequer resulting from the introduction of Carbon Tax are shown in the following tables.

Carbon Tax	2010	2011	2012 (10Mths)
	€m	€m	€m
Auto Diesel	98.41	97.53	107.17
Petrol	65.09	60.11	62.37
Aviation Gasoline	0.04	0.04	0.04
Kerosene	16.99	40.52	28.54
MGO	27.03	48.95	44.16
Fuel Oil	1.57	2.33	1.86
LPG (other)	2.59	5.43	4.94
Auto LPG	0.04	0.20	0.20
Natural Gas	11.32	43.13	37.47
Total	223.08	298.23	286.75

Value Added Tax	2010	2011	2012 (10Mths)
(Estimated)	€m	€m	€m
Auto Diesel	2.07	2.05	2.46
Petrol	13.67	12.62	14.35
Aviation Gasoline	0.01	0.01	0.01
Kerosene	2.29	5.47	3.85
MGO	3.65	6.61	5.96
Fuel Oil	-	-	-
LPG (other)	0.35	0.73	0.67
Auto LPG	0.01	0.05	0.05
Natural Gas	0.92	3.49	3.04
Total	22.96	31.03	30.38

Please note that the VAT receipts are estimated, as the VAT returns do not require the yield from a particular sector or sub-sector of trade to be identified and the actual VAT yield for each category cannot therefore be determined.

EU Directives

90. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Finance his position in relation to the proposals to revise the existing energy taxation directive; his views on whether the negotiations on this directive will be completed during Ireland's Presidency of the European Council; in view of Ireland's existing carbon tax regime; if the principle of subsidiarity will be applied to Ireland if any mandatory carbon tax regime is introduced across the EU; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50436/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The taxation of energy products is to a certain extent harmonized at EU level. Directive 2003/96/EC known as the Energy Tax Directive (ETD) refers. The current ETD provides for minimum excise rates of taxation for energy products based on the volume of a product released for consumption. Member States must respect the minimum rates and not tax products below those rates, but are free to set higher rates for individual fuels as they see fit. The current Irish national rates are generally above the EU minimum rates. The aim of the Commission's proposal is to revise the ETD to bring it in line with wider EU climate change and energy policy to which all Members States have signed up. Ireland broadly supports the principle of the proposal and welcomes the introduction of a

carbon tax element into the EU minimum rates, it will serve to lessen competitiveness concerns arising from Ireland being a lead country in the area of carbon taxes.

Discussions are ongoing under the Cypriot Presidency and, if the file is not concluded by the end of the year, Ireland will endeavour to progress the negotiations during its Presidency.

Banking Sector Regulation

91. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Finance if bank bonuses were already discussed at the level of EU leaders; or if there are plans to discuss them in the context of the Liikanen review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42930/12]

92. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Finance if he has discussed increasing banking regulation with any of the EU leaders recently; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42927/12]

97. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Finance if he has received a copy of the Liikanen Review Report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45674/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 91, 92 and 97 together.

In May 2012 the Commission called for a banking union to restore confidence in banks and in the euro. This was reflected in the report on Economic and Monetary Union prepared by the Presidents of the European Council, the Commission, the Eurogroup and the European Central Bank. A complete banking union is understood to combine a single supervisory structure, a single rulebook, a common deposit protection and a single bank resolution mechanism. The Interim report on the Future of the Economic and Monetary Union from the President of the Council was discussed at the European Council on 18/19 October. Discussions are continuing in relation to proposals on a Single Supervisory Mechanism and the associated regulation amending the European Banking Authority Regulation, the Bank recovery and resolution proposal, the recast of the deposit Guarantee Scheme Directive and the Capital Requirements Regulation and Directive (CRD IV). The issues raised by the Deputy refer primarily to the Capital Requirements Regulation and Directive. I attended the ECOFIN Council meetings on 9 October and 13 November. At both of these meetings the Cypriot Presidency gave an update on the progress thus far in the negotiations with the European Parliament on the Capital Requirements Regulation and Directive (CRD IV). The two proposals set out to amend and replace the existing capital requirement directives by two new legislative instruments: a regulation establishing prudential requirements that institutions need to respect, and a directive governing, amongst other things, access to deposit-taking activities.

They are aimed at transposing into EU law an international agreement approved by the G-20 in November 2010. The Basel III agreement, concluded by the Basel Committee on Banking Supervision, aims to strengthen bank capital requirements, introduces a mandatory capital conservation buffer and a discretionary countercyclical buffer, and foresees a framework for new regulatory requirements on liquidity and leverage. While the proposed regulation and directive contain references to the issue of bank remuneration, the issue of bank bonuses was not discussed at the recent ECOFIN meetings.

In tandem with this, the conclusions of the Heads of State or Government at the European Council on 18/19 October called for the rapid conclusion of the single rule book, including

agreement on the proposals on bank capital requirements (CRD IV) by the end of the year.

As the Deputy will be aware, the Liikanen Report was published on 2 October 2012 and my Department has received a copy of the Report and is carefully considering the Recommendations of the Liikanen Group, which includes a number of recommendations on banks' remuneration schemes including bonuses. The European Commission is currently conducting a public consultation and a legislative initiative is not anticipated before spring of next year. A legislative initiative would likely be accompanied by a regulatory impact analysis and further consultation period.

I look forward to seeing the results of the public consultation currently underway. We will need to examine the outcome of this process and the impact of any forthcoming legislative proposals on our recovering banking system.

Ireland broadly supports the EU's regulatory initiatives to bring greater stability to the banking sector. We agree that the EU banking sector should be capable of meeting the needs of and supporting EU economies and societies. I hope that our efforts in this regard will convert a safe and stable banking system into one that also supports growth in the real economy.

Irish Fiscal Advisory Council Reports

93. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Finance his views on whether the recommendations of the Fiscal Council should be implemented; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42653/12]

96. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Finance if he has received the recommendations of the Fiscal Council; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45673/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 93 and 96 together.

In line with normal practice, the Fiscal Council forwarded its September 2012 Fiscal Assessment Report to me just before its publication. The Fiscal Council's analysis and recommendations were considered in my Department's preparation of its updated economic and fiscal projections, which will be published this month in the Medium-Term Fiscal Statement (MTFS).

The Council believes that it would be prudent for the Government to implement more consolidation than currently planned so as to achieve a deficit of 1.9% of GDP in 2015. This would require €1.9 billion in additional consolidation over what is set out in the SPU for the period 2014-2015 but would result in a significantly improved debt trajectory. The Fiscal Council suggested that there be no additional consolidation in 2012, but further consolidation of €0.4 billion in 2014 and €1.5 billion in 2015. The Council suggests that this could provide additional fiscal sustainability, by front-loading the consolidation necessary to meet the General Government Deficit target of 3% by 2015.

While the Fiscal Council suggests that it would be prudent to undertake additional consolidation in 2014 and 2015, it states that the additional adjustment is not recommended lightly given the existing pressures on domestic demand and the high burden of unemployment.

The Government is very conscious of the potential impact additional consolidation could have on economic activity. In striving to restore sustainability to the public finances, it is necessary to also be mindful of protecting the emerging economic recovery and seek to strike the right balance between the two. This balancing act is difficult but the Government view is that a

reasonable balance has been achieved. The consolidation completed to date has been achieved with remarkable social cohesion, and the adjustment path is supported by the European Com

mission, ECB and IMF. The fact that the Council sees Ireland achieving its deficit targets on the basis of the already committed adjustments reinforces this view in that regard. However, we will continue to closely monitor economic developments and will take the measures necessary to meet our targets.

Official Engagements

94. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Finance if he has met the members of the Fiscal Council recently; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44105/12]

98. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Finance if officials from his Department have met with members of the Fiscal Council recently; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47227/12]

105. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Finance if he has met the Fiscal

Council or members thereof recently; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49612/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 94, 98 and 105 together.

The following table details recent meetings between the Department of Finance and the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council.

Minister/Officials	Date of Meeting	Nature of Meeting
Finance Officials	Tuesday, 23rd October 2012	To discuss methodological issues related to the Departments forecasting approach
Minister Noonan and 2 Finance Officials	Thursday, 25th October 2012	General fiscal discussion
Finance Officials	Tuesday, 6th November 2012	To discuss practices & procedures required in order to set up IFAC on a statutory basis

As the Deputy will be aware, officials from my Department are in regular contact with the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council in relation to various matters.

European Council Meetings

95. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Finance if the reports that the draft EU agenda for the October Council meeting contain proposals for tighter binding contracts for eurozone countries expanding control of national economic policies are correct; his policy in relation to same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44101/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Arising from the Four Presidents' Paper on the Economic and Monetary Union was released in June, an interim report was presented by President Van Rompuy to the October European Council. Among other things, the report identified the single supervisory mechanism and the broader banking union as essential building blocks to delivering a genuine Economic and Monetary Union. The report included proposals which, according to Van Rompuy, would improve the resilience of the Economic and Monetary Union as a whole. One of the proposals in the interim report was that Member States could enter into individual arrangements of a contractual nature with the EU institutions on the reforms they commit to undertake. President Van Rompuy received a mandate, together with his colleagues, to explore the proposals further and to present a specific roadmap for the achievement of a genuine Economic and Monetary Union at the December 13-14 European Council.

Question No. 96 answered with Question No. 93.

Question No. 97 answered with Question No. 91.

Question No. 98 answered with Question No. 94.

Question No. 99 answered with Question No. 85.

Ministerial Meetings

100. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Finance the number of bilateral meetings he has held with Mr. Mario Draghi since 1 January 2012. [47361/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Since January 2012, I have held two individual meetings with Mr Mario Draghi. In addition, I have ongoing regular interaction with Mr Draghi at Eurogroup meetings and other European meetings.

European Stability Mechanism

101. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Finance if he has made an assessment on the wider implications of Irish banks being part of the European Stability Mechanism; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47588/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As you will be aware, the Euro Area Summit Statement of 29th June affirmed that it is imperative that the vicious circle between banks and sovereigns be broken. Work is continuing at a technical level to put in place both the single supervisory mechanism, and the European Stability Mechanism's direct banking recapitalisation facility, at the earliest possible date. Ireland is participating constructively in these technical discussions.

The most recent European Council on 18/19 October 2012 concluded that:

“The Eurogroup will draw up the exact operational criteria that will guide direct bank recapitalisations by the European Stability Mechanism (ESM), in full respect of the 29 June 2012 euro area Summit statement. It is imperative to break the vicious circle between banks and sovereigns. When an effective single supervisory mechanism is established, involving the ECB, for banks in the euro area the ESM could, following a regular decision, have the possibility to recapitalize banks directly.”

It is important from Ireland's perspective, that progress towards these goals is made as quickly as possible, and as I have already mentioned we are playing our full part in this work.

The implications of any ESM participation in Irish banking recapitalisation are being considered as part of our overall approach to these discussions. However, at this stage it is not possible to form a definitive view on this matter.

Budget Submissions

102. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Finance if he or his officials have received the St. Vincent de Paul Society pre-budget submission; his plans to meet the society; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48177/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I have received a pre-Budget submission from the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. Its contents will be considered in the context of the forthcoming Budget and Finance Bill. As Deputies are aware it would not be appropriate for me to comment in advance of the Budget on possible Budget decisions. I have met recently with a number of groups as part of the Budget 2013 process. These included the Community and Voluntary Pillar. The Pillar is comprised of seventeen organisations representing the interests of people from many different sectors of society and includes the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

Question No. 103 answered with Question No. 85.

European Financial Stability Facility

104. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Finance if the lack of need for a bailout for Spain was discussed with Prime Minister Rajoy; the implications of this position for Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48329/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): European Finance Ministers and Heads of State and Government meet and discuss regularly with their colleagues, including important issues such as economic and financial vulnerabilities. Regarding any need for a bailout, it is ultimately up to the authorities of a country to determine the existence of such a need, request assistance, and to decide on when they draw on said assistance so long as they continue to fulfil any agreed measures.

In July, Spain and the EFSF signed a Memorandum of Understanding. The purpose of this programme is to assist Spain with its measures to reinforce its financial stability. The Memorandum specifies financial sector conditionality and, upon observance thereof, allows Spain to draw up to EUR100bn from the EFSF for the purpose of recapitalisation of its financial sector. Spain has not seen the need to request a fully-fledged programme.

Ireland, for its part, continues on its adjustment path and is making progress toward re-establishing sustainable market access. Of course, the external environment is important for Ireland's recovery and for sustained market access. Hence, Ireland has an interest in seeing Spain make good progress toward stabilisation and recovery.

Question No. 105 answered with Question No. 94.

Sale of State Assets

106. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Finance if financial advisers have been appointed to act on the sale of Bord Gáis Energy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43495/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Following a competitive procurement process carried out in accordance with relevant national and EU guidelines, the NTMA (acting through its NewERA Unit) has appointed Barclays Bank PLC to provide advice and assistance to the NTMA (acting through its NewERA Unit) and the Ministerial stockholders of Bord Gais Eireann (“BGE”) in relation to the proposed disposal of BGE Energy. The BGE Board, who will be responsible for implementing the transaction, are currently in the process of finalising the appointment of their own financial advisors, to provide advice and assistance to the Board in implementing the detailed steps involved in executing the transaction.

Questions Nos. 107 and 108 answered with Question No. 85.

Financial Transactions Tax

109. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Finance if he raised the issue of the financial transaction tax in Europe at the meeting with the European Commission in Brussels on 3 October; and if he indicated this as a priority for the forthcoming EU Presidency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43087/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): On 3 October I met Commissioner Máire Geoghegan-Quinn. The discussion was primarily on the negotiations for the next Multi-Annual Financial Framework, which is the EU Budget cycle for 2014-2020. Therefore I did not directly raise the issue of the Financial Transaction Tax. However, as part of the discussion at the bilateral meeting, the Commissioner’s Chef de Cabinet mentioned that the new Financial Transaction Tax was being considered for use as an own resource, that is a revenue stream for the EU.

Tax Reliefs Application

110. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Finance the position regarding the programme for Government commitment and national pensions framework proposal to reduce tax reliefs on private pensions in view of comments (details supplied) that the reliefs will not be reduced but instead a cap introduced and if he will elaborate on those comments. [49832/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I assume the Deputy is referring to the commitment in the Government’s Programme to cap taxpayers’ subsidies for future pension schemes that deliver income in retirement of more than €60,000. The maximum allowable pension fund at retirement for tax purposes (the Standard Fund Threshold) has already been significantly reduced in Budget and Finance Act 2011 from over €5.4 million to €2.3 million while the annual earnings cap which operates in conjunction with age-related percentage limits to determine the annual amount of tax-relievable contributions that can be made by an employee or individual to pension savings has been reduced from over €275,000 in 2008 to its

current level of €115,000 per annum. The level and design of these thresholds and caps are, for example, among the range of issues for consideration relevant to achieving the commitment referred to. The National Pensions Framework, which was published by the previous Government in March 2010, included among other things, proposals to introduce a new pension system involving auto-enrolment for employees without supplementary pension coverage. The system proposed in the Framework would be introduced when the prevailing economic circumstances allowed. The Framework proposed the introduction of a State contribution equivalent to 33% tax relief in respect of employees covered by auto-enrolment. This equivalent relief would also

replace the current standard and marginal rates of tax relief for existing contributors to pension saving. I would expect that the report of the independent review of long term pension policy in Ireland, currently being conducted by the OECD on behalf of the Minister for Social Protection, may also deal with the issue of an auto-enrolment pension system.

The debate around the incentive regime for pension saving has tended to focus either on a further reduction in the maximum allowable pension fund for tax purposes at retirement or on a reduction in the rate of tax relief on pension contributions. These approaches are not, of course, mutually exclusive. In my 2012 Budget speech in December last, I said that I did not propose to make changes to the existing marginal rate relief at that time but that the incentive regime for supplementary pension provision will have to be reformed to make the system sustainable and more equitable over the long term. I said that my Department and the Revenue Commissioners would work with the various stakeholders in the next year to develop workable solutions. On foot of this, a broad informal consultation was undertaken this year across a spectrum of stakeholders in the pensions sector to establish their views on further changes to the incentive regime for pension saving.

I will give due consideration to the views of all interested parties in the pensions sector in the context of any proposals I may make to Government regarding the incentive regime for pension saving.

Departmental Staff Promotions

111. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Finance the number of promotions made in his Department to principal officer higher scale, principal officer standard scale, assistant principal officer higher scale, assistant principal officer standard scale, higher executive officer scale, executive office scale and staff officer scale; the total for all of his Department; if he will provide a breakdown for for 2009, 2010, 2011 and to date in 2012; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50976/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Since my appointment as Minister for Finance on 9 March 2011, 24 staff members who were serving as Administrative Officer (AO) and Higher Executive Officer (HEO) have been awarded promotions through an internal competitive process to Assistant Principal Higher level. 8 staff members, serving as Assistant Principal (AP) have been awarded promotions through an internal competitive process to Principal Higher (PO) level.

6 staff members serving as Executive Officer (EO) have been awarded promotions through

an internal competitive process to Higher Executive Officer.

10 staff members serving as Staff Officer (SO) and Clerical Officer (CO) have been awarded promotions through an internal competitive process to Executive Officer.

School Transport Availability

112. **Deputy Derek Keating** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will intervene in the school bus service that is provided by CIÉ and that has been withdrawn from the parents and school children from the Lucan area, County Dublin, who attend a school (details supplied), while at the same time the service remains in place for families from nearby Celbridge, County Kildare, and in view of the very close proximity of the Celbridge route to Lucan and the fact that so many Lucan families are being discommoded by losing this established school bus service, if he will engage with CIÉ with a view to having the Lucan bus service re-established; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44959/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): Under the terms of my Department's School Transport Scheme a minimum number of 10 eligible children residing in a distinct locality, as determined by Bus Éireann, are required before consideration may be given to the retention of school transport services, provided this can be done within reasonable cost limits.

Bus Éireann, which operates the school transport schemes on behalf of my Department, has advised that as the above criteria was not met for the 2011/12 school the service was withdrawn. Bus Éireann has also advised that no applications for school transport, from the area in question, were received for the 2012/13 school year.

Eligible children, for whom there is no school transport service available, may apply for a remote area grant towards the cost of making private transport arrangements.

Student Grant Scheme Delays

113. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will ensure that college students will not incur late penalties on their fees while waiting for the grants to be finalised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50203/12]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The Higher Education Authority (HEA) on foot of a request from my Department, has written to all higher education institutions requesting them to show flexibility and consideration, as most have done in the past, to students who may be awaiting a decision on their grant application and/or payment of grants.

The HEA has requested institutions to consider not withdrawing facilities such as library or exam access, given that these students are awaiting decision on their grant applications. The situation is being kept under review.

Psychological Assessments

114. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a child (details supplied) in Dublin 11 will receive a psychological assessment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50205/12]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I can inform the Deputy that all primary and post primary schools have access to psychological assessments either directly through the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), or through the Scheme for Commissioning Psychological Assessments (SCPA), full details of which are on the Department's website. Where a NEPS psychologist is not assigned to a school, authorities therein may access psychological assessments through SCPA. Under this scheme schools can have an assessment carried out by a member of the panel of private psychologists approved by NEPS, and NEPS will pay the psychologist the fees for this assessment directly.

It should also be noted that in common with many other psychological services, NEPS encourages a staged assessment process, whereby each school takes responsibility for a pupil's initial assessment, educational planning and remedial intervention. Only if there is a failure to

make reasonable progress in spite of the school's best efforts, will a child be referred for individual psychological assessment. I have made enquiries in respect of this case and can inform you that, to date, no request has been made to the assigned NEPS psychologist in relation to the assessment of the child referred to in the Deputies question.

It is the responsibility of the school Principal in the first instance to identify and prioritise pupils for assessment under the process described above. I would suggest that the parents of the child in question should discuss the matter with the school Principal who will advise them as to the appropriateness of a referral to or intervention by the school's assigned NEPS psychologist in this instance.

Should school authorities have specific difficulties with regard any of the foregoing I would suggest that they contact the relevant local NEPS Office (in this instance NEPS Office, Frederick Court, Tel: 01-8892700 to discuss the matter.

Special Educational Needs Staffing

115. **Deputy Tom Hayes** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding an application by three County Tipperary schools for a temporary resource teacher; and if he

will make a statement on the matter. [50207/12]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The NCSE has notified all schools of their allocation for the 2012/13 school year of resource hours for low incidence special needs. The arrangements for how schools access these resource hours in teaching posts are set out in the Department Staffing Circular 0007/2012. Under these arrangements a network of over 2,500 full-time resource posts has been put in place in close to 1,700 base schools throughout the country. The list of these schools and the criteria used to select them is set out in the published circular.

These resource posts are allocated on a permanent basis and the teachers in them will undertake NCSE approved (low incidence) resource hours in the base schools or in neighbouring schools. Schools that are unable to access these hours are approved mainly for temporary part-time posts. It is also open to schools to make a joint application for a full-time temporary resource post. The schools referred to by the Deputy submitted an application for such a post.

However as they did not have sufficient hours to warrant the full-time post they were each approved for part-time posts.

Departmental Bodies Establishment

116. **Deputy Arthur Spring** asked the Minister for Education and Skills following the formal establishment of Quality and Qualifications Ireland, when will new applications for training provider registration be processed and if any further guidelines, frameworks and the development of codes need to be established prior to applications being accepted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50228/12]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I formally established Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) on Tuesday 6 November. This involved the amalgamation of the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI), the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) and the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC). Significant work has been completed by those bodies on core administrative preparations for the establishment of the new Authority. However, the establishment of QQI also involves the amalgamation of processes, including ones that have operated differently in the different agencies due to the history and nature of the different sectors. This will require the reconfiguration of current services such as the registration process for new providers, the validation and accreditation of programmes, the monitoring and review of providers and the development, review and certification of awards. This will include the development of formal guidelines, criteria and procedures pursuant to the new Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012.

It is anticipated that new applications will be accepted by QQI from Spring 2013.

School Staffing

117. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on correspondence (details supplied) regarding schools in Clontarf; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50296/12]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The salaries of teachers employed within the approved annual staffing allocation for fee charging schools by my Department, are paid by the State; an arrangement that pre-dates the introduction of the Free Education scheme and which exists since the foundation of the State. The estimated cost of these posts is in the order of €100m.

The Deputy will be aware that I announced a review last December, in the context of the Budget 2012, where I made a further one point change to the staffing allocation of fee charging schools. I indicated at the time that the purpose of the review would be to inform future policy in relation to exchequer support for these schools.

The review will be included in the material used to inform Government deliberations on the next budget.

I would like to make it clear that there has been no decision relating to fee paying schools and any budget adjustments for this year.

Given the extremely difficult economic circumstances that this country is facing and the fact that every Department has to find considerable cost-savings, all expenditure must be examined

to see if cost-savings can be found.

I wish to reiterate that no decisions in relation to the upcoming Budget have been made.

Student Grant Scheme Delays

118. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the higher education grant applications in respect of persons (details supplied) in County Mayo; the reason for the delay in processing their applications; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50326/12]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Officials in my Department have confirmed with SUSI, the new centralised grant awarding authority, that in the case of the

first student referred to by the Deputy a grant has been awarded and an award letter issued on 13th November, 2012.

In the case of the second student referred to by the Deputy a grant has been awarded and an award letter issued on 12th November, 2012.

Student Grant Scheme Applications

119. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will expedite a grant application in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50339/12]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Officials in my Department have confirmed with SUSI, the new centralised grant awarding authority, that in the case of the student referred to by the Deputy a grant has been awarded and an award letter issued on 13th November, 2012.

Student Grant Scheme Applications

120. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will expedite a grant application in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50340/12]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Officials in my Department have confirmed with SUSI, the new centralised grant awarding authority, that on review further supporting documentation is needed from the student referred to by the Deputy and this is being requested from the student. When the documentation is returned to SUSI the student will be notified directly of the outcome.

Student Grant Scheme Eligibility

121. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position

regarding student grants in respect of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50348/12]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The student grant scheme includes provision for grants to eligible students pursuing full-time undergraduate courses of at least two years duration in publicly-funded institutions in other EU member states. However, the student grant scheme does not extend to postgraduate study outside of Ireland.

I have no plans to change the current arrangements. Any such proposal would have to be considered in light of existing resources and other competing demands in the education sector.

The student to which the Deputy refers may be eligible for tax relief on their tuition fees. Details on this relief are available at www.revenue.ie.

Student Grant Scheme Payments

122. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a determination will be made regarding a grant application in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50404/12]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Officials in my Department have confirmed with SUSI, the new centralised grant awarding authority, that in the case of the student referred to by the Deputy a grant has been awarded and an award letter issued on 7th November, 2012.

Special Educational Needs Services Provision

123. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will provide in tabular form the number of places available at pre-school, primary school and post-primary school levels in County Donegal for children diagnosed as being on the autistic spectrum; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50418/12]

124. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will provide in tabular form of the total number of special needs assistant hours allocated to children in County Donegal who have been diagnosed as being on the autistic spectrum; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50419/12]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I propose to take Questions Nos. 123 and 124 together.

I wish to advise the Deputy that the National Council for Special Education (NCSE), through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs), is responsible for processing applications from schools for special educational needs supports, including the allocation of Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) to schools and the establishment of special classes in various geographical areas, as required.

The NCSE operates within my Department's established criteria for the allocation of Special Education supports and the staffing resources available to my Department. I wish to advise the Deputy that SNAs are not allocated to individual pupils. The NCSE allocates a quantum of SNA support for each school annually taking into account the care needs of all of the qualifying children enrolled in the school, and on the basis of the assessed care needs of the children, rather than solely by reference to a pupils' disability categorisation. SNAs should then be deployed

by schools in a manner which best meets the care support requirements of the children enrolled in the school for whom SNA support has been allocated. It is a matter for schools to allocate support as required, and on the basis of individual need, which allows schools flexibility in how the SNA support is utilised.

As such, the specific information requested by the Deputy in relation to the number of SNA hours allocated to children with autism in Co. Donegal is not quantifiable, as the level of SNA support provided per pupil is not designated on the basis of disability categorisation, nor is there a set limited allocation of hours per pupils, once an allocation has been made to a school, and where care needs can vary over time.

I can advise the Deputy, however, that all schools have been advised by the NCSE of their SNA staffing allocations for the current school year. Details of the SNA allocations which have been made to each school, including schools in County Donegal, are available at www.ncse.ie and are detailed on a per County basis.

In addition, in relation to the availability of placements, I wish to explain that my Department strives to ensure that a continuum of special education provision is available as required for children with special educational needs. In line with this approach the policy is to promote a child-centred approach to education of all children with special educational needs including those with autism. As each child with autism is unique they should have access to a range of different approaches to meet their individual needs. Children with autism present with a wide range of needs. Some children are capable of being fully integrated into mainstream schools without additional teaching or care supports. Others are able to attend mainstream schools but need additional teaching and/or care assistance. Many are best enrolled in autism-specific classes where more intensive and supportive interventions are required. Some may move from one setting to another as they get older and differing needs/strengths/abilities emerge.

The Deputy will be aware that the establishment of a network of autism-specific special classes in schools across the country to cater for children with autism has been a key educational priority in recent years. In excess of 540 special classes for children with autism have been approved around the country at primary and post primary level, including many in special schools. Twenty five such special classes are provided in Donegal. Thirteen new special schools for children with autism were also granted official recognition in 2010. However, as children with autism may also attend mainstream classes in primary and post primary schools, there are not a set number of places specifically designated for children with autism in Co. Donegal.

Energy Conservation

125. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to require all schools in receipt of capitation funding to implement targeted energy efficiency programmes to cut wasteful usage of lighting, heating and electronic equipment, considering that existing voluntary and piecemeal projects show the potential to save 15%–40% of schools' energy costs within two years at most, using models and guidance provided by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland which are unknown to most schools; his views on whether such energy efficiencies could save up to €15 million a year of the €200 million cost of capitation funding, thereby making cuts that do not hurt in place of cuts to vital educational services; and

if he will make a statement on the matter. [50425/12]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): For the past 15 years the Planning and Building Unit of my Department have been using a process called the DART approach to develop sustainability and energy efficiency in educational buildings. This acronym focuses on four key areas, namely; Design, Awareness, Research and Technology. The policy is informed by the Building Unit Professional and Technical staff, driven by its technical guidance documents and updated by continued energy research and development.

It has been demonstrated that all School's designed and built in line with the above policy and the technical guidance documents can have an energy performance that is more than twice as efficient as international best practice.

Under my Department's Summer Works Scheme in excess of €182 million has been spent since 2009 on improvements to mechanical and electrical installations, toilets, windows and roofs in both primary and post-primary schools across the country which is contributing to the energy efficiency of these buildings. In addition €15 million has been spent under my Department's 2009 Energy Efficiency Scheme and further €7.4 million under the 2010 Water Conservation Scheme. In total in excess of €204 million has been provided to school to assist with energy efficiency and conversion since 2009 which represents 16% of the total overall capital spend on school building since 2009.

My Department in conjunction with Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) has developed an "Energy in Education" website (www.energyineducation.ie) which I launched recently. The website is designed to help school boards of management, principals, teachers, administrators, caretaking staff, pupils and parents to improve energy use practices and to reduce school operating costs along with helping to protect the environment for future generations.

Student Grant Scheme Eligibility

126. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason a person (details supplied) in County Wexford did not receive a higher education grant from Student Universal Support Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50444/12]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The decision on eligibility for a student grant is a matter for the relevant grant awarding authority.

Where a grant application is refused, the reason for the refusal is given by the grant awarding authority. An applicant may appeal that decision to the appeals officer in the relevant awarding authority.

Where the appeals officer decides to reject the appeal, the applicant may appeal this decision to my Department or the independent appeals board, as appropriate. No appeal has been received in my Department to date in this case.

Public Sector Reform Review

127. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of bodies that have been abolished or amalgamated by his Department out of the list of bodies listed in the public service reform document of 17 November 2011; the savings or cost of this in 2012; the projected savings or cost of this programme in 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50537/12]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Under the Public Service Reform the following were identified for rationalisation:-

- The merger of the Irish Research Council for Science, Engineering and Technology & Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Science into consolidated single council under HEA;

- The amalgamation of Further Education and Training Awards (FETAC), Higher Education and Training Award Council (HETAC) and National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) into one body the QQI;

- The reduction of the number of VEC's from 33 to 16.

The Irish Research Council for Science, Engineering and Technology and Irish Research Council for Humanities and Social Sciences were merged in March 2012 to form the Irish Research Council (IRC). The IRC has been established as a sub-board of the HEA. As a result of the merger it is expected that there will be a saving of some €100,000 in 2012 and 2013.

Under the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012, the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI), the Higher Education Training Awards Council (HETAC) and the Further Education Training Awards Council (FETAC) were amalgamated into a new agency, the Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) on the 6th November, 2012.

Major savings had already been achieved through the administrative preparations for amalgamation through non-replacement of staff retiring or leaving, the consolidation of the CEO role and streamlining of operations across the existing bodies. The 2012 current allocation for the bodies was €7.7 million, compared to an outturn of over €13 million in 2008. Staffing in NQAI, HETAC and FETAC has reduced from 110 to 80 over the same period. As well as the more general savings arising from organisational efficiencies, specific savings relating to accommodation and staffing arise from the amalgamation. The amalgamating agencies were located in four separate locations and this has been reduced to two. This has realised annual rent savings of approximately €400,000 in a full year. In addition, the reduction in the number of CEOs has resulted in savings of approximately €250,000 per year from 2011 onwards. It is estimated that the costs arising from the amalgamation in 2012 will be approximately €1.8 million, split evenly between accommodation costs and the integration of ICT infrastructure. However, it should be noted that this has been managed in the context of reduced Exchequer allocations since 2008.

In June of 2011, I announced that the Government had approved a revised reconfiguration of the Vocational Education Committees system. The Government decision confirmed that the number of VECs would be reduced to 16 but involves different mergers to those announced by the previous Government.

It is expected, pending passage of the legislation through the Oireachtas, that the Education and Training Boards will be established in early 2013. Consequently, there are no direct savings for 2012. Depending on the date of establishment in 2013, full year savings are estimated at €2.1 million.

School Management

128. **Deputy Paudie Coffey** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he intends to

review the practice of primary schools only submitting accounts to his Department on request; if he will now make it mandatory to reduce the risk of misappropriation of funds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50560/12]

129. **Deputy Paudie Coffey** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of primary schools that have been requested to submit their annual accounts to his Department for the year 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011 and to date in 2012, if he will provide this information in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50561/12]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I propose to take Questions Nos. 128 and 129 together.

Every primary school is, in accordance with section 18 of the Education Act 1998, required to keep all proper and usual accounts and records of all monies received by it or expenditure of such monies incurred by it and must ensure that in each year all such accounts are properly audited or certified in accordance with best accounting practice. The Act further requires that such accounts shall be made available by the school for inspection by the Minister and by parents of students in the school, in so far as those accounts relate to monies provided in accordance with Section 12 of the Act.

The Boards of Management of all primary schools are also required to comply with the provisions of my Department's "The Constitution of Boards and Rules of Procedure 2011" booklet. This booklet sets out very clearly the specific responsibilities and duties of the Board in relation to school finances, accounting practice and the role and duties of the treasurer appointed by the Board. Among the specific control measures to safeguard against fraud or misappropriation of school funds, the booklet requires that:-

- All expenditure by or on behalf of the Board of Management must be approved by the Board;

- The Board must satisfy itself that proper internal controls are in place for all financial transactions;

- The Treasurer must retain vouchers of expenditure for inspection and audit by the school's accountant and by officials of the Department;

- The Treasurer must present at each Board meeting an up-to-date statement of the school accounts giving details of income and expenditure since the previous meeting;

- A total account of the Board's income and expenditure must be prepared at the end of each school year and must be properly audited or certified in accordance with best accounting practice. This account should be made available for inspection to the school community including parents, the Patron, Trustees and the Minister.

During the periods referred to by the Deputy, my Department has, on occasion and for various purposes, sought school accounts from specific primary schools. However, the records of this process are not recorded centrally within my Department so it is not possible to provide the type of detail requested by the Deputy. I have no plans to make the type of changes suggested by the Deputy nor does my Department have capacity for detailed analysis of school accounts for every school. I believe that it is better that the main focus of accountability for how primary schools operate and use their resources is dealt with at local school level via the Board of Management and local school community.

130. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of promotions made in his Department to principal officer higher scale, principal officer standard scale, assistant principal officer higher scale, assistant principal officer standard scale, higher executive officer scale, executive office scale and staff officer scale; the total for all of his Department; if he will provide a breakdown for for 2009, 2010, 2011 and to date in 2012; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50974/12]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): My Department has had no promotions to Principal Officer Standard Scale, Assistant Principal Officer Higher Scale, Assistant Principal Officer Standard Scale, Higher Executive Officer Standard Scale, Executive Officer Standard Scale, or Staff Officer Standard Scale in any of the years 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012.

Two Principal Officers Standard Scale were assigned to the Principal Officer Higher Scale in 2009 and two were assigned to the Higher Scale in 2010. One Higher Executive Officer

Standard Scale was assigned to the Higher Executive Officer Higher Scale in 2009 and two were assigned to the Higher Scale in 2010. Three (2.3 whole time equivalent) Executive Officers Standard Scale were assigned to the Executive Officer Higher Scale in 2009.

Public Sector Management Remuneration

131. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of public and civil servants who earn more than €100,000 annually; and the proportion this number represents in the public sector pay bill. [50213/12]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): I refer to my reply to Question No. 282 of 23 October 2012.

Judicial Retirement Age

132. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the date on which he reduced the retirement age for the Judiciary from 70 years to 65 years; and if his decision was backdated. [50312/12]

133. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the cost to the Exchequer in 2012 and 2013 of his decision to reduce the retirement age for the Judiciary from 70 years to 65 years. [50313/12]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 132 and 133 together.

The normal age of retirement for Judges varies. For Judges of the District Court it is age 65 and it is age 70 for Judges of the Circuit Court, High Court and Supreme Court. Judges of the Higher Courts may retire once they have served for 15 years and are aged 65. The retirement age for Judges has not been lowered however Cost Neutral Early Retirement (CNER) has been made available to them at age 60.

In 2000 the Commission on Public Service Pensions recommended the introduction of CNER to allow public servants to retire with immediate payment of superannuation benefits,

subject to actuarial reduction to cater for the longer period over which the benefits would be paid. Arising from this a CNER scheme was introduced for the generality of public servants in 2004. The Commission's remit did not extend to the Judiciary and accordingly the CNER scheme did not apply to them.

At the time of the 2011 referendum on judicial remuneration, which led to the reduction of judicial salaries and the consequent reduction in pensions for those who retired/retire on or after 1 March 2012 ("the grace period"), a commitment was given that Judges would be treated in the same way as other public servants. Against this background a CNER scheme was introduced for the Judiciary giving CNER at aged 60. The Scheme was introduced on an interim administrative basis pending legislative provision being made under the Public Service Pensions (Single Scheme and Other Provisions) Act 2012. As the title suggests, the Scheme is constructed to be actuarially cost-neutral to the Exchequer.

Departmental Staff Promotions

134. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of promotions made in his Department to principal officer higher scale, principal officer standard scale, assistant principal officer higher scale, assistant principal officer standard scale, higher executive officer scale, executive office scale and staff officer scale; the total for all of the civil service; if he will provide a breakdown for each Government Department of office for 2009, 2010, 2011 and to date in 2012; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50324/12]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The details of internal promotions since my Department was established in July 2011 are set out in the following table. Details of promotions in other Departments are a matter for those Departments.

Grade
Number of Positions filled

Principal Officer Higher Scale	2
Principal Officer Standard Scale	0
Assistant Principal Higher Scale	18
Assistant Principal Standard Scale	0
Higher Executive Officer	7
Executive Officer	5
Staff Officer	0

The overall staffing levels in my Department are determined within the context of the staffing levels governed by the Employment Control Framework (ECF) for the Department currently in place. The filling of vacancies through promotion or otherwise is determined so as to ensure that my Department is adequately resourced and skilled to meet its strategic goals and priorities.

Public Sector Reform Review

135. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of bodies that have been abolished or amalgamated by his Department out of the list of bodies listed in the public service reform document of 17 November 2011; the savings or cost of this in 2012; the projected savings or cost of this programme in 2013; and if he will make a

statement on the matter. [50544/12]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): As the Deputy is aware, the radical streamlining of State bodies is a key deliverable of the Public Service Reform Plan, published in November 2011. This streamlining includes 48 rationalisation measures to be implemented by the end of 2012, as well as a further 46 critical reviews to take place by the end of June 2012. Details of the bodies involved are set out in Appendices IIa and IIb of the Plan which can be found at: <http://reformplan.per.gov.ie/files/2012/01/Public-Service-Reform-28112011.pdf> .

On 31 October 2012, I updated my cabinet colleagues in relation to the agency rationalisation programme, which included progress on the merger of the Commission on Public Service Appointments with the Ombudsman's Office, which are under the aegis of my Department.

I am glad to say that this merger has been completed and is legislated for in the Ombudsman Amendment Act which was recently passed. From the outset I have maintained that the

real benefit from the rationalisation of state agencies will be a less crowded administrative landscape resulting in greater democratic accountability, less duplication of effort and clearer lines of responsibility. As this measure was completed on an administrative basis on 1 October 2010, any potential savings from the measure would have been taken into account in the overall consideration of the 2012 Revised Estimates for the CPSA and the Office of the Ombudsman and was reflected in their respective allocations.

Redundancy Payments

136. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the supports available to a person (details supplied) in County Kerry [50300/12]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): Under the Redundancy Payment Scheme eligible employees (with at least two years continuous service in fully insurable employment) are entitled to a minimum statutory lump sum payment on being made redundant. A redundancy situation arises in general where an employee's job no longer exists and he/she is not replaced including where the company ceases to operate because of financial or other considerations. An employee is entitled to two weeks' pay for every year of service, with a bonus week added on, subject to the prevailing maximum ceiling on gross weekly pay which is currently €600. This lump sum payment is tax free. In addition, employees are entitled to notice as per the Minimum Notice Act prior to termination of employment.

Where an employer fails to comply with his or her redundancy payment/minimum notice obligations or where there is a dispute regarding entitlements, claims may be referred by the employee to the Employment Appeals Tribunal (EAT).

Redundancy Claims to the EAT must be made within 52 weeks from:

- (i) the date of dismissal or
- (ii) the date of ending of contract of employment.

Where there are also wages and payments in lieu of annual leave untaken or any public

holiday benefit outstanding a case can be taken to the Rights Commissioners Service under the Payment of Wages Act. Cases must be referred to the Rights Commissioners Service within six months of the non-payment.

Where the employer is legally insolvent it is possible to pursue the entitlement to Redundancy Lump Sum through the Social Insurance Fund.

The form and further details on taking a case are available on the Workplace Relations Customer Services website www.workplacerelements.ie or through their Information Service at 1890 80 80 90.

Public Sector Reform Review

137. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of bodies that have been abolished or amalgamated by his Department out of the list of bodies listed in the public service reform document of 17 November 2011; the savings or cost of this in 2012; the projected savings or cost of this programme in 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50542/12]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): In the context of the Government's Public Sector Reform document of November 2011 very significant progress has been achieved in relation to the Bodies under the aegis of my Department. The Bodies that are involved in the rationalisation programme are listed in full in Table 1 as well as the savings anticipated. I would like in particular to point to significant reforms underway in a number of the Bodies listed on which work is being progressed. This includes reforms such as the merging of the Competition Authority with the National Consumer Agency; a major programme of reform in relation to the rationalisation of the employment rights Bodies to reduce these in number from five to two; Government agreement to dissolve the existing County Enterprise Boards and create a "one-stop-shop" micro enterprise support structure; the integration of Forfás into the Department in order to strengthen the Department's capacity to develop and implement enterprise policy and the decision in principle taken by Government on 8 May 2012 to separate Shannon Airport (SA) from the Dublin Airport Authority (DAA) and bring it together with Shannon Development to form a new entity with a commercial mandate in public ownership, thereby achieving the re-alignment of tourism and enterprise support functions in the Shannon region.

Table 1

Questions - Written Answers

Name of Body	Savings/cost in 2012/2013	Current Status
County and City Enterprise Board (35)	It is to be expected that over time there will be savings resulting from the removal of costs associated with the individual Company status of each CEB, use of shared services, reduced rental costs associated with the relocation of some offices etc. However initial direct savings will be modest as it could take some years to realise these savings due to existing leasing arrangements etc.	The Government has approved the restructuring of the enterprise support model for the micro and small business sectors. This restructuring will include the dissolution of the County and City Enterprise Boards (CEBs), the transfer of their functions, assets and liabilities to Enterprise Ireland (EI) and the development of a new Small and Micro Business Division within Enterprise Ireland (EI) as a centre of excellence in the provision of supports to the small and micro enterprise sectors, and the establishment of Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) to provide a “one-stop-shop” for small businesses within Local Authorities. A high level Implementation Working Group (IWG) chaired by DJEI has been established to oversee the implementation of the Government decision. The detailed arrangements for the new structures are well advanced by the IWG, including a draft of a comprehensive Service Level Agreement between EI and Local Authorities, which will underpin the new model. A project plan, which sets out clear milestones and timelines for implementation, including the legislation necessary to give formal effect to the new arrangements, is being finalised. A Memorandum to Government seeking approval to draft the General Scheme of an Industrial Development (Micro Enterprise and Small Business) Bill will be brought in Mid-November.
Competition Authority and National Consumer Agency	Initial set-up costs will be incurred. No savings in whole-time equivalent (WTE) numbers.	The legislation to give effect to the merger of the Competition Authority and the National Consumer Agency is currently on the A list of the Government’s legislative programme. It is hoped that the legislation will be published by mid-January 2013.

Name of Body	Savings/cost in 2012/2013	Current Status
<p>Labour Court National Employment Rights Authority Labour Relations Commission Employment Appeals Tribunal Equality Tribunal</p>	<p>The annual cost of the Workplace Relations Services amounted to some €20m in 2010. It is expected that significant savings, in terms of both reductions in staff numbers & increased efficiency & productivity, will be generated by the end of 2013 by which time the majority of the Workplace Relations Reform Programme will have been implemented. Work has commenced on identifying and capturing on-going pay and non-pay savings.</p>	<p>A major reform programme is underway to replace the five existing employment rights bodies with two. Four of the existing bodies – the Employment Appeals Tribunal, the National Employment Rights Authority, the Labour Relations Commission and the Labour Court – are currently within the remit of the Department. One – the Equality Tribunal – is currently within the remit of the Minister for Justice and Equality. In terms of delivering the reform a number of important priority actions have been successfully delivered, including the development of a: Single Contact Portal A new single contact portal called “Workplace Relations Customer Services” is fully operational since the beginning of 2012 and provides a single point of entry into the system for employment rights and industrial relations information. Single Complaint Form A Single Complaint Form that deals with over 100 first instance complaints was launched on the 4th of January 2012 replacing 30 forms previously in use. Workplace Relations Website The new interim workplace relations website www.workplacelrelations.ie went live on 4th January 2012. This website brings together, in one place, information on all aspects of employment rights and industrial relations. Early Resolution Service Delivery of a pilot Early Resolution Service has commenced. This service will assist parties to a dispute to resolve the issue themselves with the assistance of a Case Resolution Officer. Consultation The Minister has undertaken two public consultation processes and published two policy papers setting out in detail how the reform will be delivered. He engaged with the Oireachtas Committee on Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation in July 2012. Legislation A draft Scheme of the Workplace Relations Bill, which will put the reforms on a statutory footing, has been prepared and the Cabinet approved the priority drafting of the Bill in July 2012.</p>
<p>Forfás</p>	<p>The integration of Forfás into the Department is not driven by cost savings, but it will improve efficiencies/synergies between the Department and Forfás. It is envisaged that some savings will arise when the integration process is complete, especially in the Corporate Services area.</p>	<p>An Implementation Group, comprising senior management from the Department, Forfás, and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, is overseeing the integration project and meets on a regular basis. An Executive style Board has also been put in place in Forfás to oversee the transfer of the agency’s functions and responsibilities. Good progress is being made in identifying and resolving issues that need to be addressed. Completion of the project will require the enactment of legislation to transfer Forfás’s functions.</p>

Questions - Written Answers

Name of Body	Savings/cost in 2012/2013	Current Status
Advisory Council for Science, Technology and Innovation (ASCTI)	ACSTI operates as a sub-board of Forfás; all costs are met from the Forfás allocation.	The role of the ACSTI is being reviewed in the context of the amalgamation of Forfás into the Department and appropriate arrangements for supporting the Research Prioritisation Exercise.
National Competitiveness Council (NCC)	There is no direct funding allocated to NCC. The Secretariat to the NCC is currently provided by Forfás, and will be absorbed into the Department as part of the integration of Forfás.	The NCC will continue to operate as an independent advisory body with a refreshed mandate and potentially some changes in membership. Secretariat services will continue to be provided by Forfás/Departmental staff following the integration of Forfás into DJEI.
Shannon Development	This is a restructuring and merger of Shannon Development and Shannon Airport. As Shannon Development is self-financing there is no cost saving in either 2012 or 2013. There is an elimination of duplication of roles between Shannon Development, Enterprise Agencies and Fáilte Ireland in the region.	On 8th May 2012, the Government decided in principle to separate Shannon Airport (SA) from the Dublin Airport Authority (DAA) and bring it together with Shannon Development to form a new entity with a commercial mandate in public ownership. The Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport and the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation established a Steering Group to bring forward proposals for the implementation of that decision. Two Task Forces have also been established; the Aviation Business Development Task Force and the Change Management Task Force. The Steering Group will be reporting back to Government with proposals to implement the Government decision before the end of this month.
Office of the Chief Scientific Adviser (CSA) to the Government	The 2012 budget allocation for the Office of the CSA was €95k (this reflects 8/12 of the annual allocation as the CSA contract ceased in August 2012). In addition, two research staff, at a pay cost of €135K were available, on loan from Forfás, to support the Office.	The Office of the CSA was included in the bodies due for critical review under the Public Sector Reform initiative. Following a Government decision on 11/10/12 to abolish the separate Office of the Chief Scientific Adviser (CSA), the Director General of Science Foundation Ireland has taken on the role of Chief Scientific Adviser to the Government in addition to his existing role

IDA Site Visits

138. **Deputy Paudie Coffey** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of visits that have been made to County Waterford for the first ten months of this year, to the end of October, by potential Industrial Development Agency backed investors; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50555/12]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): I am informed by IDA Ireland that, since the beginning of 2012 to date, there have been 12 IDA sponsored site visits by potential investors to Waterford.

In order to achieve balanced regional development IDA Ireland focuses on marketing Gateway locations within each Region as the areas of critical mass and highlights the opportunities provided by Hub locations which are within commuting distances of these Gateways.

County Waterford forms part of IDA Ireland's South Economic Region along with the counties of Cork, South Tipperary, Kerry, Wexford, Carlow and Kilkenny. The locations of emphasis for IDA in this Region are the Gateways of Cork and Waterford and these are actively promoted to potential investors through IDA's network of overseas offices.

The investment projects that IDA is seeking to attract to Waterford rely principally on the skill sets of its people and on strong business and educational infrastructure in the Gateway.

I am also pleased to report that solid progress is being made on pursuing the objectives of the South East Employment Action Plan, which I initiated following the closure of the *Talk Talk* Call Centre. All the key State players are actively pursuing initiatives to facilitate development and job creation in the region.

The first phase of the €23 million Belview Strategic Water Supply Scheme was officially opened earlier this year. This will facilitate industrial development and job creation in Kilkenny and the South East. The total investment for this phase of the scheme is €13m.

Action Plan for Jobs

139. **Deputy Paudie Coffey** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if he will provide this Deputy with a detailed progress report on the delivery of the Forfás south east action plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50557/12]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): I am pleased to report that solid progress is being made on pursuing the objectives of the South East Employment Action Plan, which I initiated following the closure of the *Talk Talk* Call Centre. All the key State players are actively pursuing initiatives to facilitate development and job creation in the region. I travelled to Waterford during the summer to meet the members of the South-East Forum and I was heartened to hear of the progress being made.

Foremost amongst these has been that Enterprise Ireland has supported the establishment of the *Eishtec* Call Centre in Waterford city, where employment had reached 280. This is a very significant achievement in a short space of time. Other recent initiatives by Enterprise Ireland in the region included the approval of 14 high quality projects under their Competitive Feasibility Fund. A total of €200,000 has now been committed under this Fund and this will be paid out as the projects develop.

Earlier this year McDonald's Ireland and Dawn Meats announced that Dawn Meats had been awarded a 5 year €300 million contract to process up to 18,000 tonnes of Irish beef annually for McDonald's. The deal has led Dawn Meats to invest €14.5 million in a new purpose built, state of the art, beef processing facility in Carroll's Cross, County Waterford, creating 65 new jobs. This investment was also supported by Enterprise Ireland. Other recent Enterprise Ireland initiatives include the fact that 12 companies have been approved for Graduate Placement, 5 Community Enterprise Centres have been approved for funding to appoint full-time business development managers and there has been a high take-up of the Enterprise Ireland Innovation Voucher scheme in Waterford. Another recent Enterprise Ireland initiative has been the establishment of a '*New Frontiers Programme*' in both Carlow and Waterford Institutes of Technology, designed to support entrepreneurs (primarily in the technology and export-focused sectors) in the development of their business plans. There are 20 participants now on this pro-

gramme.

The two local County Enterprise boards, in the city and county, have created a significant number of new jobs and the South East Regional Authority has secured EU funding for a number of enterprise and innovation-focussed projects.

FAS training services having provided training for over 5,000 people and that Agency is also undertaking a wide range of other training initiatives. Several tourist initiatives are underway in the region and Science Foundation Ireland has funded 8 research awards to Waterford Institute of Technology.

Other developments include the first phase of the €23 million Belview Strategic Water Supply Scheme which was officially opened earlier this year. This will facilitate industrial development and job creation in Kilkenny and the South East. The total investment for this phase of the scheme is €13m.

I will continue to pursue ongoing co-operation and collaboration between all the various stakeholders across the South East region to pursue the Action Plan recommendations.

Departmental Staff Promotions

140. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of promotions made in his Department to principal officer higher scale, principal officer standard scale, assistant principal officer higher scale, assistant principal officer standard scale, higher executive officer scale, executive office scale and staff officer scale; the total for all of his Department; if he will provide a breakdown for for 2009, 2010, 2011 and to date in 2012; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50979/12]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The information requested by the Deputy with regard to my Department is set out in tabular format.

Promotion Grade	2009	2010	2011	2012 to date	Total 2009-2012 to date
Executive Officer	3				3
Higher Executive Officer		1		1	2
Assistant Principal, Standard Scale			5	5	10
Principal Officer, Standard Scale	1		1	4	6
Total	4	1	6	10	21

Gender Recognition Issues

141. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Social Protection her plans to introduce gender recognition legislation in order to comply with obligations under the European Convention on Human Rights; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [50227/12]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Gender Recognition Advisory Group (GRAG) was established in 2010 to advise the Government on the legislation required to give legal recognition to the acquired gender of transgender persons. The Report of the Group, which recommends a scheme for the legal recognition of transgender persons, was approved by the Government on 12 July 2011, and was subsequently published on 14 July, 2011.

Since the publication of the Report, the Department has been working on developing draft Heads of a Gender Recognition Bill. In this context, it has engaged in discussions with the relevant medical health professionals and with representatives from interested NGOs. Given the legal complexities involved in relation to some of the GRAG recommendations relating to the marital and civil partnership status of individuals, in March, my Department sought advice from the Office of the Attorney General, which in turn sought the legal opinion of external counsel on these issues.

Preliminary discussions have taken place between my Department, the Office of the Attorney General and the Department of Justice and Equality in relation to the legal opinion of external counsel. The Office of the Attorney General is in the process of considering the various approaches suggested by counsel. Once my Department receives the formal legal advice from the Office of the Attorney General, this will inform the drafting of the Heads of Bill. Given the sensitive and complex nature of the issues involved, it is my intention to ask the Oireachtas Committee on Jobs, Social Protection and Education to discuss the provisional draft Heads of Bill once they are completed.

It is therefore not possible to be definitive at this stage about when I will be in a position to introduce legislation to give legal recognition to the acquired gender of transgender persons. When my Department has received the formal opinion of the Attorney General's Office and when the Oireachtas Committee has discussed the provisional draft Heads of Bill I will be in a better position to give a timeframe for the introduction of the legislation.

Carer's Allowance Applications

142. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Social Protection when back payment that will be granted in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Cork; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [50217/12]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): This application for carer's allowance was awarded on 13th November 2012 at a rate of €204.00 per week. A letter with all details of payment issued to the person in question on 13th November 2012. Arrears are due from 22nd August 2011 to 21st November 2012. These arrears will issue shortly less any deductions in respect of other social welfare payments made during the period and any overpayment which may exist.

Rent Supplement Scheme Payments

143. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Social Protection the impact of rising rental properties in Dublin, as outlined by the recent survey carried out by a company referred to in the Minister's Rent Limit Review Report in 2011, will have on the allowable rent rates for

rent supplement; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [50257/12]

168. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will provide in tabular form per county the number of persons who have sought rent supplement for the years 2009, 2010, 2011 and to date in 2012; the number of these that have been refused specifically because the rent on the property has been over the cap set by her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [50409/12]

(Deputy Joan Burton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 143 and 168 together.

The purpose of the rent supplement scheme is to provide short-term support to eligible people living in private rented accommodation whose means are insufficient to meet their accommodation costs and who do not have accommodation available to them from any other source. The overall aim is to provide short term assistance, and not to act as an alternative to the other social housing schemes operated by the Exchequer. There are currently approximately 89,000 rent supplement recipients for which the Government has provided €436 million for the scheme in 2012.

The State plays a major role in the private rental market through the rent supplement scheme. As the Department currently funds approximately 30% of the private rented sector it is essential that State support for rents are kept under review and reflect current market conditions. Revised maximum rent limits came into force on 1 January 2012 and are in place until June 2013. The emphasis of the rent limit review was to ensure that maximum value for money for tenants and the taxpayer was achieved whilst at the same time ensuring that people on rent supplement are not priced out of the market for private rented accommodation.

Statistics are not available in relation to the number of rent supplement applications received for the past 3 years and to date in 2012 or the outcome of those applications. However, the following tabular statement shows the number of rent supplement claims awarded in each of the past 3 years and to date in 2012.

There are currently over 32,700 rent supplement recipients in Dublin representing approximately 37% of the total customer base showing that customers of the scheme are being

accommodated. The Department will continue to monitor rent levels in Dublin and throughout the country but at this point I have no immediate plans to revise the existing rent limits.

Details of claims awarded from 2009 to 2012:

Year	Rent Supplement
2009	87,802
2010	71,674
2011	63,878
2012 (1)	42,873

(1) To 9 November 2012.

Back to Education Allowance Applications

144. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Social Protection further to

Parliamentary Questions Nos. 559 and 560 of 6 November 2012, if she will provide as requested the circumstances and number of occasions where the requirement for progression has been waived under the back to education allowance; if she will address the specific circumstances of the two individual cases highlighted in Parliamentary Question No. 560; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [50270/12]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): As previously outlined to the Deputy, the back to education allowance (BTEA) is a second chance education opportunities scheme designed to remove the barriers to participation in second and third level education by enabling those in receipt of certain social welfare payments to continue to receive a payment while pursuing an approved full-time education course that leads to a higher qualification than that already held.

BTEA guidelines are, in the main, in line with the mechanisms in place for student support type schemes administered by the Department of Education and Skills. Progression in education is a condition which is not unique to BTEA, indeed State support for education purposes is grounded on a student progressing from one qualification level to a higher one. This is necessary to ensure displacement does not occur, in that courses could be offered to students who are not progressing at the cost of students progressing from a lower education level.

BTEA is a non-statutory scheme with administrative operational guidelines. While BTEA policy and guidelines are developed centrally in the Department, the decision making function on individual claims is devolved to the local and branch office network of the Department. Determining officers are instructed to adhere to, and take account of the scheme guidelines in their entirety, when making all BTEA decisions and in cases where any conditions are not satisfied BTEA should not be awarded.

The Deputy is aware that the Department is currently reviewing a wide range of activation supports available to DSP customers, including BTEA, and it is the intention to canvass the views of stakeholders as part of the implementation process resulting from the review.

Officials are available to discuss specific cases and brief you on other supports that may be available to assist unemployed persons where BTEA conditions are not satisfied.

Carer's Allowance Applications

145. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a decision will issue on a carer's allowance application in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Limerick; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [50272/12]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I have been advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that the appeal by the person concerned has been allowed by an Appeals Officer on a summary basis following consideration of the documentary evidence in the case. The person will be notified of the outcome in the coming days.

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.

Local Employment Service Issues

146. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Social Protection the position regarding full

time opportunities for mediators within the local employment agencies; if such consideration will be given to a position (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [50279/12]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Department has a contract for 2012 with Kildare Local Employment Services Network for the provision of local employment services in county Kildare. In the case of Leixlip, the service is provided on a full-time basis by two part-time staff one of whom recently left. Approval to recruit a replacement was given by the Department. The composition of resources for next year will be considered as part of the contract process for 2013

Carer's Allowance Applications

147. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a person (details supplied) in County Offaly may expect a decision on an application for carer's allowance [50284/12]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): This application was awarded on the 9th October 2012 at a rate of €204.00 per week.

Rent Supplement Scheme Appeals

148. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a person (details supplied) in County Offaly may expect a decision on an appeal for rent allowance. [50286/12]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that this case was referred to an Appeals Officer on 2nd October 2012, who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the 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. 149 withdrawn.

Illness Benefit Appeals

150. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a person (details supplied) in County Offaly may expect a decision on an appeal for illness benefit.

[50291/12]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that the appeal from the person concerned was assessed by a Medical Assessor of the Department of Social Protection who was of the opinion that he was capable of work. He appealed this decision and in that context the appeal was assessed by another Medical Assessor who also expressed the opinion that he was capable of work.

In the light of this, it was decided to afford the person concerned an opportunity of setting out the complete and up to date grounds of his appeal and to furnish any further medical evidence that he wished to submit in support of his appeal. He did this and, at this stage, the Department of Social Protection have been requested to submit relevant documents to this office on his case.

On receipt of their response his appeal will be referred to an Appeals Officer for consideration.

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.

State Pension (Non-Contributory) Appeals

151. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a decision will issue on a non contributory pension in respect of persons (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [50304/12]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that these cases were assigned to an Appeals Officer on 31st August 2012, who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the 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. 152 withdrawn.

Carer's Allowance Applications

153. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Social Protection the position regarding carer's allowance in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Clare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [50343/12]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): This application was disallowed on 24 August 2012 on medical grounds, based upon the evidence supplied in support of the application. A letter issued on that date notifying her of this decision, the reasons for it and of her right of review or appeal. If the person in question has additional evidence in support of her claim, they should submit it to the department with a request for a review. Alternatively, she may appeal the decision in writing directly to the Social Welfare Appeals Office clearly stating the grounds for appeal.

Public Sector Pensions Legislation

154. **Deputy John Lyons** asked the Minister for Social Protection if any changes will be considered to the application of the Social Welfare and Pensions Bill to take account of public servants who took early retirement prior to the changes to average yearly contribution bands but who do not turn 66 years before 2020. [50344/12]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The terms and conditions of employment for public servants, including pension rights, are outside of my remit and are a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform. Therefore, the Social Welfare and Pension Bill will not include any special provisions regarding public servants who took early retirement

In relation to State pension which is within my remit, as the Deputy will be aware, the State pension is a very valuable benefit and therefore, it is important to ensure that those qualifying have made a sustained contribution to the Social Insurance Fund over their working lives.

Recent changes to the rate bands payable for State Pension is one element of pension reform put in place to put State pension provision on a more sustainable footing.

Prior to the rate band changes on 1 September 2012, a person with an average of 20-47 PRSI contributions per year over their working life received a weekly State pension of only €4.50 less than a person with a yearly average of 48 or more PRSI contributions. This was not equitable. On 1 September 2012, additional rates bands for State pension (transition) and State pension (contributory) were introduced and while the maximum rate and the rate payable to people with an average of between 40 and 47 contributions per year remains unchanged, those who have fewer than 40 contributions per year will receive a lower rate of pension. The change to State pension rate bands means that pension payments will be more closely related to PRSI payments made over a working life. This ensures that those who contribute more during their working life will benefit more in retirement, thereby ensuring equity in the social welfare system. These changes apply universally for claimants with an eligibility date post 1 September 2012.

This change to rate bands moves somewhat closer to a total contribution approach, where benefits are paid in proportion to contributions made, i.e. those who pay more, benefit more. It is proposed to adopt a 'total contributions approach' to State pension to replace the current averaging system from 2020. This will replace the current system and remove the associated anomalies whereby those who pay less could in fact receive a higher payment. Under this system, the level of pension paid will be directly proportionate to the number of social insurance contributions made by a person over his or her working life.

If claimants have an income need they may, following a means test, qualify for a higher rate on the State pension (non-contributory).

Community Employment Schemes Places

155. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of participants by county currently on community employment schemes; if she will consider creating extra placements for CE schemes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [50345/12]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Table

County/Area	12/11/2012
Dublin 1	570
Dublin 2	392
Dublin 3	173
Dublin 4	52
Dublin 5	224
Dublin 6	53
Dublin 7	149
Dublin 8	581
Dublin 9	214
Dublin 10	238
Dublin 11	403
Dublin 12	307
Dublin 13	49
Dublin 15	335
Dublin 16	54
Dublin 17	404
Dublin 18	16
Dublin 20	36
Dublin 22	288
Dublin 24	470
Dublin West	14
Dún Laoghaire/Rathdown	359
Dublin North County/Fingal	294
Kildare	626
Meath	417
Wicklow	646
Cavan	210
Louth	762
Monaghan	339
Carlow	319
Kilkenny	395
Tipperary (South Riding)	550
Waterford City	431
Waterford County	273
Wexford	847
Laois	299
Longford	290
Offaly	357
Roscommon	344
Westmeath	534
Cork City	1,087
Cork County	1,017
Kerry	971

County/Area	12/11/2012
Clare	571
Limerick City	623
Limerick County	535
Tipperary (North Riding)	390
Galway City	311
Galway County	1,136
Mayo	741
Donegal	1,117
Leitrim	181
Sligo	390
TOTAL	22,384

The Department is committed to reforming CE to ensure delivery of service, value for money and the progression of the individual. The broad policy direction for CE in 2013 and future years will be based on the main action points coming from the CE Financial Review which has recently been completed and published by the Department. No determination has yet been made in relation to CE places for 2013.

Question No. 156 withdrawn.

Disability Allowance Appeals

157. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will expedite an appeal for disability pension in respect of a person (details supplied). [50347/12]

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 17 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 appeal in question will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the 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. 158 withdrawn.

Carer's Allowance Appeals

159. **Deputy Noel Coonan** asked the Minister for Social Protection when an application for a carer's allowance appeal will be finalised in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Tipperary [50355/12]

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 26th September 2012. Once a deciding officer has carried out all the necessary investigations in relation to this application, a decision will issue directly to the person in question.

Carer's Allowance Appeals

160. **Deputy Noel Coonan** asked the Minister for Social Protection when an application for a carer's allowance appeal will be finalised in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Tipperary; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [50362/12]

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 23 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 appeal in question will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the 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.

Carer's Allowance Appeals

161. **Deputy Noel Coonan** asked the Minister for Social Protection when an application for a carer's allowance appeal will be finalised in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Tipperary; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [50364/12]

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 28 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 appeal in question will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the 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. 162 withdrawn.

Disability Allowance Applications

163. **Deputy Noel Coonan** asked the Minister for Social Protection when an application for a disability allowance will be finalised in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Tipperary; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [50370/12]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I am advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that an Appeals Officer having fully considered all the available evidence, including that adduced at oral hearing, allowed the appeal of the person concerned. The person concerned was notified of the Appeals Officer's decision on 7 November 2012.

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.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Applications

164. **Deputy Noel Coonan** asked the Minister for Social Protection when an application for domiciliary care allowance will be finalised in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Tipperary; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [50386/12]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): An application for domiciliary care allowance was received on the 2nd July 2012. This application was referred to one of the Department's Medical Assessors who considered that the child was not medically eligible for the allowance. A letter issued on the 20th August 2012 advising of the decision. The person concerned subsequently requested a review of the decision. The case was reviewed by another Medical Assessor on the 12th November 2012, who, having examined all the information supplied, confirmed the opinion that the child was not medically eligible for the allowance. A letter issued on the 12th November 2012 advising of the decision.

As the person concerned had only requested a review of the case it is now open to her to appeal the decision to the Social Welfare Appeals Office within twenty one days.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Applications

165. **Deputy Noel Coonan** asked the Minister for Social Protection when an application for domiciliary care allowance will be finalised in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Tipperary; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [50387/12]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): An application for domiciliary care allowance (DCA) was received on the 11th April 2012. This application was referred to one of the Department's Medical Assessors who found that the child was not medically eligible for DCA. A letter issued on the 1st June 2012 refusing the allowance. The person concerned subsequently lodged an appeal against this decision.

As part of the appeal process, the case has been forwarded to another of the Department's Medical Assessors for further consideration, including a review of any new information supplied. Upon receipt of the Medical Assessor's opinion, the case will be further examined and will be forwarded for consideration by the Appeals Office, if necessary.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Applications

166. **Deputy Noel Coonan** asked the Minister for Social Protection when an application for domiciliary care allowance will be finalised in respect of a person (details supplied) in County

Tipperary; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [50388/12]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): An application for domiciliary care allowance was received from the person concerned on the 19th October 2011. This application was referred to one of the Department's Medical Assessors who found that the child was not medically eligible for the allowance. A letter issued on the 5th January 2012 advising of the decision. The person concerned subsequently lodged an appeal against this decision and supplied additional information on the child's condition. As part of the appeal process, the application along with the additional information provided was reviewed by a second Medical Assessor who found the child to be medically eligible for the allowance.

The person concerned was notified of the decision on the 23rd October 2012 and the first payment will issue on 20th November 2012.

Supplementary Welfare Allowance Application Numbers

167. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will provide in tabular form per county the number of persons who have applied for supplementary welfare allowance who have left the home due to domestic violence for the years 2009, 2010, 2011 and to date; the number of these that have been refused; her views on whether it is appropriate that community welfare officers have complete discretion in awarding payments in the case of domestic violence; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [50408/12]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The supplementary welfare allowance (SWA) scheme is considered the "safety net" within the overall social welfare system in that it provides assistance to eligible people in the State whose means are insufficient to meet their needs and those of their dependants. The main purpose of the scheme is to provide immediate and flexible assistance for those in need who do not qualify for payment under other State schemes. SWA can consist of a basic primary weekly payment and/or a weekly/monthly supplement in respect of certain expenses a person may not be able to meet (e.g. rent supplement). It can also consist of a once-off payment to help with the cost of any exceptional needs of a once-off nature.

Statistics are not available on the number of SWA applications received from customers who have left their homes due to domestic violence for the past 3 years and to date in 2012 or the outcome of those applications.

Where a claimant's safety and wellbeing are at risk due to domestic violence Department officials administering the SWA scheme have discretionary powers to expedite the award of a payment to the person in question. I am satisfied that the discretionary powers available to Department officials administering the SWA scheme are appropriate to assist those affected by domestic violence.

Question No. 168 answered with Question No. 143.

Social Welfare Benefits Eligibility

169. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will provide in tabular form per county the number of persons who have been refused social welfare payments or supplementary welfare including rent supplement for the years 2009, 2010, 2011 and

to date in 2012 on the grounds of the habitual residence condition; the number of those refused on habitual residence condition grounds that were born in Ireland; the number of those refused on the habitual residence condition who have members of their immediate family living here; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [50410/12]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The information requested by the Deputy is not available. Information relating to the disallowances of individuals who have immediate family members residing in Ireland is not captured during the claim decision making process. However, information pertaining to overall disallowances on the grounds of the habitual residency condition including those disallowances relating specifically to Irish nationals is contained in the tabular statement.

Table: Claims disallowed under Habitual Residence Condition, 2009 – 2012

Year:	2009	2010*	2011	2012 to date
Irish Disallowances	738	650	455	264
Total Disallowances	10,582	5,906	4,494	1,992

**Please note that figures for 2010 are incomplete due to industrial action.*

Social Welfare Appeals Delays

170. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason for the delay in processing the claim in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Donegal who submitted an appeal in June 2012 and has been informed that their file is still waiting to be passed on to an appeals officer; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [50413/12]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me this case was referred to an Appeals Officer on 12th November 2012, who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the 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.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Appeals

171. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the position regarding a domiciliary care allowance appeal in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Limerick; when a decision will be made; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [50420/12]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised that this case was referred to an Appeals Officer on 6th November 2012, who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the 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.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Payments

172. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of domiciliary care allowance payments made to parents of children in County Donegal who have been diagnosed as being on the autism spectrum; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [50421/12]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Statistics on customers in receipt of domiciliary care allowance are not collated on a county basis. As a result the information requested in relation to customers resident in county Donegal is not available.

Carer's Allowance Applications

173. **Deputy Simon Harris** asked the Minister for Social Protection if it is correct that a directive has been given to the carer's allowance section whereby two teams have been set up, one to deal with all carer's allowance applications from August 2012 and the second to deal with all applications received prior to August 2012; is it correct that applications from August 2012 will be dealt with quicker than applications in the system pre August; if this is the case, if she will explain the rationale behind such a directive and the reason applicants who have been waiting the longest are not having their applications processed first; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [50428/12]

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 and I can assure the Deputy that clearing the backlog is of primary importance and is getting full attention. Implementation of the new focused plan commenced on Monday 3 September and is being 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, and this increase continues into November. However, it will take a number of months to clear the backlog.

Family Income Supplement Applications

174. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Social Protection the position regarding an application for family income supplement in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Mayo and if the application will be expedited due to severe financial hardship; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [50438/12]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Department is committed to providing a quality service to all its customers. This includes ensuring that applications are processed and that decisions on entitlement are made as quickly as possible. In the case of the person concerned his family income supplement (FIS) payment expired 29th August 2012. His renewal application has recently been awarded from 30th August 2012 to 28th August 2013 and he will receive his first payment on 21st November 2012. The person concerned will shortly receive a notification with full details of this decision.

Child Benefit Payments

175. **Deputy Paul J. Connaughton** asked the Minister for Social Protection her views on the extra costs that multiple births place on families of twins and triplets in terms of childcare in the pre-school years and the additional cost of equipment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [50439/12]

180. **Deputy John Halligan** asked the Minister for Social Protection her views on the proposals to cut additional payments to parents of multiple births in budget 2013 (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [50553/12]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 175 and 180 together.

Child benefit is a monthly payment made to families with children in respect of all qualified children up to the age of 16 years. The payment continues to be paid in respect of children up to their 18th birthday who are in full-time education, or who have a physical or mental disability. The estimated expenditure on child benefit for 2012 is around €2 billion and it is paid to around 600,000 families in respect of some 1.15 million children. Parents of multiple birth children receive an additional monthly premia paid at one and a half times the monthly child benefit payment rate for each twin and double the monthly payment rate for each child in other multiple births. While Budget 2012 maintained this additional monthly payment, the multiple births grant of €635 paid at birth, at 4 years of age and at 12 years of age was discontinued.

As a universal payment child benefit assists parents with the cost of raising children and it contributes towards alleviating child poverty. The Government is also conscious that child benefit is an important source of income for all families, especially during a time of recession and high unemployment. Bearing this in mind, any plans to change the amount paid in respect of such payments will be a matter to be decided in a budgetary context and announced on Budget day. I do not therefore propose to speculate on any possible approaches to child benefit payment rates changes.

The issue of the extra costs associated with multiple births and the additional assistance provided to these families was considered in the context of a Department of Social Protection value for money review on child income support payments, published in 2010. The review found that there is an absence of current data regarding the actual difference in costs between families of multiple birth children and other families of equal size.

I am conscious that achieving a better design of the overall system of child income supports, including child benefit, raises complex issues about the effectiveness of the full range of income supports currently provided to families and their children. In this context and in line with a commitment in the Programme for Government, I established an Advisory Group on Tax and Social Welfare last year, which has been tasked with recommending cost-effective solutions as to how employment disincentives can be improved and better poverty outcomes achieved, particularly child poverty outcomes. The Advisory Group prioritised the area of family and child income supports and has completed its work on this area. Their report is currently receiving my consideration and will assist the Government in setting out a pathway towards a more appropriate system of child income supports.

Question No. 176 withdrawn.

Carer's Allowance Applications

177. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Social Protection the position regarding carer's allowance in respect of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 3 [50455/12]

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 20th December 2011. The medical assessment has been completed. The application is currently with a social welfare investigative officer for a means assessment and confirmation that all the conditions for receipt of carer's allowance are satisfied. Once the investigative officer has completed and submitted the report a deciding officer will make a full decision. The application will be processed as quickly as possible and when a decision is made the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

Social Insurance Issues

178. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Social Protection the extent to which benefit in kind to an employee in the form of pension contributions by their employer is subject to employers and employee PRSI; and her estimate of the financial impact on the social insurance fund in the event of 10% of employee pension contributions switching to employer contributions. [50531/12]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): In a Revenue Approved Occupational Pension Scheme the employer's contribution is not considered to be a benefit-in-kind to the employee. In the case of a PRSA or an RAC, contributions made by an employer on behalf of an employee are treated as a benefit-in-kind of the employee. In Budget 2011 employee contributions to occupational pension schemes and other pension arrangements became subject to employee PRSI and the employer PRSI exemption for employee contributions was reduced to 50%. In Budget 2012 the 50% relief on employer PRSI for employee contributions was removed.

Contributing to a pension scheme is important to ensure that individuals have made adequate provision for a pension when they come to retire, rather than rely solely on the State pension.

The rules of each scheme determine the respective employer and employee pension contributions. There are no estimates available on the financial impact on the social insurance fund in the event of 10% of employee pension contributions switching to employer contributions.

Public Sector Reform Review

179. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of bodies that have been abolished or amalgamated by her Department out of the list of bodies listed in the public service reform document of 17 November 2011; the savings or cost of this in 2012; the projected savings or cost of this programme in 2013; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [50545/12]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The statutory bodies operating under the aegis of the Department of Social Protection are the Citizens Information Board, the Pensions Board, the Pensions Ombudsman and the Social Welfare Tribunal.

The Public Service Reform Programme provides that the integration of the regulatory functions of the Pensions Board with the Financial Regulator and the merging of the Pensions Ombudsman with the Financial Services Ombudsman be the subject of a critical review.

The review will include identifying any potential savings arising from such an amalgamation. The Critical Review Group held its first meeting in July 2012. I expect to receive a report from the Group by end 2012. Following receipt of this report, decisions in relation to possible reforms will be taken.

Question No. 180 answered with Question No. 175.

Job Initiatives

181. **Deputy Paudie Coffey** asked the Minister for Social Protection when the Pathways to Work initiative will be rolled out to Waterford city and county; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [50558/12]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Pathways to Work document states that the introduction of the new Intreo service is a multi-annual project. All elements of the Intreo service will be operational in four offices by the end of November 2012 and a further six offices are expected to be live by the end of the year.

The plans for 2013 are now being developed and the selection of offices will depend upon a range of factors including availability of suitable accommodation and the necessary skilled and trained staff being available in a location to deliver the full range of services.

I will announce the names of the next phase of offices when the final selections have been made.

Departmental Staff Promotions

182. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of promotions made in her Department to principal officer higher scale, principal officer standard scale, assistant principal officer higher scale, assistant principal officer standard scale, higher executive officer scale, executive office scale and staff officer scale; the total for all of her Department; if she will provide a breakdown for for 2009, 2010, 2011 and to date in 2012; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50981/12]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): As the Deputy will be aware since 2009 there is a moratorium on promotion within the Civil Service. However, given the increased demands on the services of my department, exceptional sanction was received from Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to fill critical vacancies in locations where posts could not be filled by the redeployment or transfer of staff.

In addition, under the Programme for Government, the Department has been tasked with the development of a new integrated income support and employment support service, which involved the integration of over 1,700 staff from the Community Welfare Service (CWS) of the Health Service Executive (HSE) and the Employment/Community Services from FAS. The Department is now the largest civil service organisation with a total staff compliment of just over 7,100 employees and 6,700 posts.

The Department put a new regional and divisional management structure in place, to support the new service delivery model and the Department's business support areas. In this regard, the Department sought and received sanction from Department of Public Expenditure and Reform for additional promotions as no senior management structure, (officials above AP level), transferred with the 1,000 staff from the HSE. Initially, eight higher duty allowances allowing staff to perform duties at Principal Officer level were awarded to manage the transfer of the CWS service and the ongoing operations and integration of this business area. These posts were subsequently assigned on a permanent basis, following a competitive process in early 2012.

The information requested by the Deputy in relation to each of the years 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012 is detailed in the accompanying table:

Number of Assignments to Higher Scales and Promotions

Grade	2009	2010	2011	2012	TOTAL
Principal Officer Higher Scale	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
Principal Officer Standard Scale	Nil	3	Nil	13	16
Assistant Principal Higher Scale	6	6	Nil	Nil	12
Assistant Principal Standard Scale	8	3	12	12	35
Higher Executive Officer	18	7	13	11	49
Executive Officer	32	1	4	17	54
Staff Officer	55	31	11	19	116
TOTALS	119	51	40	72	282

Archaeological Sites

183. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht his plans to include a site (details supplied) as a tentative UNESCO site; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50221/12]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan): The current Tentative List of Irish sites submitted to UNESCO in March 2010 for World Heritage status was compiled on the basis of the recommendations of an expert advisory group and an extensive public consultation process. The Tentative List is an inventory of those properties in Ireland considered suitable for inscription on the World Heritage list on the basis of criteria laid down by UNESCO. A property must be on the Tentative List before UNESCO may consider it for inscription on the World Heritage List.

While I appreciate the historical and archaeological importance of the site referred to by the Deputy, there are no proposals at present to submit any amendments or additions to the Tentative List.

Arts Funding

184. **Deputy John Lyons** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht his plans to ensure continued investment in the arts, including the allocation of funding to the Arts Council and local authorities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50278/12]

185. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if he will ensure that funding for the arts is protected in the upcoming budget. [50302/12]

186. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if he will support continued investment in the Arts as part of a jobs creation measure (details supplied). [50454/12]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 184 to 186, inclusive, together.

Government policy on the arts is set out in the Programme for Government . As Minister responsible for the arts and culture sectors, I am committed to securing the best possible funding provision for them during my term of office.

Government policy is to promote and strengthen the arts in all its forms, increase access to and participation in the arts, make the arts an integral and valued part of our national life, and maximise the potential for cultural tourism. Primary responsibility for the promotion of the arts at all levels throughout the country is devolved to the Arts Council, which, under the Arts Acts, is independent in its funding decisions. In 2012, the Arts Council received an allocation of over €63 million – a curbing of the budgetary decline of previous years.

The Government appreciates the importance of the arts, culture and the creative industries to both our society and to our economy. I am fully aware of the challenges for those involved in the arts and culture sectors and of the tremendous work they are doing. I am committed to supporting the essential elements of the arts and culture sectors, within the available financial resources and in the light of the evolving budgetary and Estimates processes.

Public Sector Reform Review

187. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the number of bodies that have been abolished or amalgamated by his Department out of the list of bodies listed in the public service reform document of 17 November 2011; the savings or cost of this in 2012; the projected savings or cost of this programme in 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50533/12]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan): I can advise the Deputy that no organisations or agencies funded from my Department's Vote Group have been abolished. However, the Public Service Reform Plan published by the Government on 17th November 2011 outlined a series of rationalisation measures and some of those measures related to a certain number of the bodies funded from my Department's Vote Group. Since then, my Department has conducted a critical examination of the structure and operation of the institutions included in the Public Service Reform Plan. Summary documents which outline the main outcomes of this examination in relation to these bodies and institutions have been published on my Department's web-site and can be accessed through the following link: <http://www.ahg.gov.ie/en/PublicServiceReform/>

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.

Departmental Staff Promotions

188. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the number of promotions made in his Department to principal officer higher scale, principal officer standard scale, assistant principal officer higher scale, assistant principal officer standard scale, higher executive officer scale, executive office scale and staff officer scale; the total for all of his Department; if he will provide a breakdown for for 2009, 2010, 2011 and to date in 2012; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50970/12]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan): The Deputy will be aware that my Department was established on 2 June 2011. There have been two promotions in my Department since that date: one to Executive Officer in 2011 and one to Wildlife Inspector Grade 1 in 2012.

Telecommunications Services Provision

189. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources his views on a matter raised regarding a possible breach of EU law (details supplied); the action he is taking in this regard; the correspondence he has had with ComReg on the subject; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50232/12]

190. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if Ireland is in breach of EC Directive 2009/136EC by not intervening to stop a company (details supplied) from blocking Skype on their network and not allowing customers to use it out of their paid for data allowances. [50301/12]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): I propose to take Questions Nos. 189 and 190 together.

The provision of telecommunications network services, including Skype services, is a matter in the first instance for private sector service providers operating in a liberalised market regulated by the Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg). I am advised by ComReg that they have just recently received a small number of consumer complaints in respect of the blocking of Skype and are currently investigating the matter.

Warmer Homes Scheme Applications

191. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will request the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland to reopen the warmer homes scheme application in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Mayo. [50322/12]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): Better Energy: Warmer Homes delivers a range of energy efficiency measures to households that are vulnerable to energy poverty. The scheme is managed by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) and delivered through a combination of SEAI appointed Community Based Organisations (CBOs), augmented by a panel of private contractors in order to ensure national coverage.

In order to deliver Better Energy: Warmer Homes upgrades, the SEAI contacts the relevant homeowner to arrange for a survey to be completed so that the extent of the upgrades can be assessed and quantified. Unfortunately, the SEAI was unable to contact the homeowner by telephone to arrange the survey despite numerous attempts to do so. In such cases, the SEAI issues a letter requesting the homeowner to make contact within 15 days so that they can arrange a survey or cancel the application if services are no longer required. Where the homeowner does not make contact within 15 days, the SEAI proceed with cancelling the application and issue a cancellation letter to the homeowner. While a letter was issued to the homeowner, given the specific circumstances in this case, the SEAI has confirmed that they will make contact with the homeowner with a view to delivery in 2012.

Queries in relation to individual applications are an operational matter for the SEAI and a dedicated hot line can be reached at 1800 250 204. In addition, the SEAI has established a specific email address for queries from Oireachtas members, which can be sent to oireachtas@seai.ie and will be dealt with promptly.

Energy Usage

192. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources his views on whether in view of the budgetary pressures, urgent savings should be made across the board in the public sector's estimated energy bill of €500 million per year, rather than continuing with voluntary and piecemeal projects; if so, if his Department will implement energy efficiency targets of 20% for the public sector over the next two years, instead of the 3% per annum efficiencies that the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland is currently working towards, thus saving €100 million a year in public expenditure; if he will assure Dáil Éireann that SEAI has sufficient resources to support all public sector bodies to achieve these savings by making cuts that do not hurt; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50323/12]

193. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources in view of huge budgetary pressures, urgent savings should be made across the board in the public sector's estimated energy bill of €500 million a year, rather than con-

tinuing with voluntary and piecemeal projects; if so, if his Department will implement energy efficiency targets of 20% for the public sector over the next two years, instead of the 3% per annum efficiencies that Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland is currently working towards, thus saving €100 million a year in public expenditure; if he will assure Dáil Éireann that SEAI has sufficient resources to support all public sector bodies to achieve these savings by making cuts that do not hurt; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50422/12]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte):

I propose to take Questions Nos. 192 and 193 together.

The National Energy Efficiency Action Plan (NEEAP) sets out 90 actions that Government is either already taking or will take in the period to 2020 to achieve the national energy efficiency targets of 20% across the economy and 33% in the public sector. The savings identified in the Action Plan represent approximately €1.6 billion in avoided energy costs for the economy in 2020. The second Action Plan, approved by Government this week, provides a progress report on delivery of the national energy efficiency objectives and shows that Ireland is on track to deliver the 20% energy savings target by 2020. The Plan will also set out a range of energy saving actions in the public sector, which will be prioritised between now and 2020.

The public sector is estimated to spend more than €500 million per annum on energy. Achieving the 33% savings target for the public sector would save €150 million each year in expenditure. This Government remains firmly committed to meeting this target. In order to underpin delivery of the national energy savings target, my Department and the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) is working together to establish a comprehensive monitoring and reporting system whereby all energy usage in the Public Sector will be accounted for and progress will be systematically recorded. I recently wrote to the head of each of the public bodies, reminding them of their obligation to report annually their energy usage to SEAI. Enclosed with each letter was the SEAI report: 'Energy Use in the Public Sector', which outlines savings achieved to date across the public sector to end-2010 amount to 650 GWh.

This year SEAI has targeted the top 135 public bodies, which account for over 95% of public sector energy consumption. These organisations will submit detailed energy and activity data to SEAI. From this data detailed progress scorecards will be produced for each organisation. From 2013 on, an SEAI online energy data system will facilitate all public bodies and schools to report detailed energy data and allow SEAI to prepare detailed scorecards for all public bodies.

Since 2009, my Department through SEAI has supported over 140 public sector retrofit projects. This year the Better Energy Workplaces 2012 Fund has offered support to 145 projects – 44 of which are in the public sector. This scheme has developed public sector and market competence and capacity for pay-as-you-save type models. I recently approved the formation of an action group to develop a framework for energy performance contracting, which will stimulate mass scale retrofitting projects across the public sector. This has been complemented by the Government decision to require all public sector bodies to go out to the market for energy services if their energy spend is more than €500,000 per year. The energy performance contracting framework will allow public bodies to implement projects whilst, most importantly, not relying on additional public expenditure to do so, thus not impacting on their capital budgets whilst also reducing their operating costs.

Through all of the measures outlined including NEEAP, comprehensive monitoring and reporting of energy use in the public sector, Better Energy Workplaces and the energy performance contracting framework, the exemplary role of the public sector will stimulate investment in energy efficient technologies and the development of a market for energy services and

products.

Offshore Exploration

194. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 638 and 640, if he will detail all exploration and appraisal efforts that have been conducted in the geographical area known as the Corrib gas field; the proposals for further exploration in this area; if there are further finds or enhancements of oil or gas assets, will the Irish State find itself in the same revenue sharing position; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50437/12]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): The Corrib Gas field was discovered in 1996 under Frontier Exploration Licence 3/94 which was granted in March 1994 and surrendered in June of this year. The most recent activity on this licence was the drilling of the “Corrib North” exploration well in 2010. The well was unsuccessful as it failed to encounter hydrocarbons and was plugged and abandoned. Other than the Corrib gas field, there have been no other hydrocarbon discoveries under the licence.

In relation to the Corrib Gas field, the Corrib Partners are in receipt of a Petroleum Lease issued on 15 November 2001 pursuant to section 13 of the Petroleum and other Minerals Development Act, 1960, as amended. The duration of the Lease is 25 years but this can be extended with the agreement of the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources subject to terms and conditions, for example in circumstances such as where this were required in order to maximise production of the gas reserves. The most recent appraisal activity carried out in the geographical area of the Corrib Gas Field is an Ocean Bottom Cable Seismic Survey to further refine the understanding of the Corrib Gas reservoir. Profits from production of gas under the Corrib Petroleum Lease will be subject to corporate tax at a rate of 25%.

With regards to exploration activity generally, there are twenty exploration licences and eighteen licensing options active in the Irish offshore. Exploration activities under these authorisations are ongoing and subject to the performance of agreed work programmes including detailed reporting and the release of exploration data and evaluation reports to my Department. Details of all petroleum authorisations are published on my Department’s website on a quarterly basis and are available at the following link:<http://www.dcenr.gov.ie/Natural/Petroleum+Affairs+Division/Acreage+and+Activity+Reports/>

Public Sector Reform Review

195. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the number of bodies that have been abolished or amalgamated by his Department out of the list of bodies listed in the public service reform document of 17 November 2011; the savings or cost of this in 2012; the projected savings or cost of this programme in 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50535/12]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): I wish to advise the Deputy that I have not abolished any State Bodies since taking office on 9 March 2011. My Department has reviewed the rationalisation proposals for agencies under its aegis as set out in the Public Service Reform Plan. The outcome of this review, which was recently published by the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, is that the Digital

Hub Development Agency (DHDA) will be merged (initially on an administrative basis) with Dublin City Council (DCC) by the end of 2012, pending enactment of legislation, which is expected to yield short term savings of approximately €400k, which amounts to over 20% of the Exchequer current subvention. The most significant benefits to be gained from a merger of the DHDA with DCC are the synergies created from a closer relationship between the DHDA and the range of disciplines and skills available within the DCC.

In addition, the Government also announced further proposed mergers, which include provision for the Ordnance Survey of Ireland to merge with the Valuation Office and Property Registration Authority by the end of 2013. The merger potentially provides an opportunity for more efficient and cost-effective delivery of land and property administration services. Medium term savings are likely to be achievable in the areas of common back office functions such as HR, conventional (non-specialised) IT systems, Financial Management and Corporate Services. There may also be potential savings in the areas of accommodation and software licences. In the longer term, more efficiencies/synergies in delivery of the merged organisation's services may lead to further savings in operational areas. Additional commercial revenues which would reduce the burden on the State may also be achievable in the medium to long term. The lead Department in relation to this rationalisation is the Department of Justice and Equality.

There is also provision for the back-office administrative functions of the Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg) to be merged with the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI) by the end of 2013. I would advise the Deputy that neither BAI nor ComReg are Exchequer funded and any savings achieved would not accrue to the Exchequer. Future tangible back office savings derive mainly from the merging of the support systems and pooling of outsourced functions and external consultancies in the short to medium term.

Departmental Staff Promotions

196. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the number of promotions made in his Department to principal officer higher scale, principal officer standard scale, assistant principal officer higher scale, assistant principal officer standard scale, higher executive officer scale, executive office scale and staff officer scale; the total for all of his Department; if he will provide a breakdown for for 2009, 2010, 2011 and to date in 2012; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50972/12]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): The information requested by the Deputy is outlined in the following table:

Grade	2009	2010	2011	2012
Principal Officer Standard Scale	0	0	1	0
Assistant Principal Officer Standard Scale	0	0	0	0
Higher Executive Officer	0	0	0	0
Executive Officer	0	2	2	2
Staff Officer	0	0	0	0

My Department does not have posts at the grades of Principal Officer Higher (PO1) or Assistant Principal Officer (AP1).

Nuclear Plants

197. **Deputy Gerald Nash** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he has been in contact with his counterpart in the UK in view of the British Government's National Audit Office complaints in relation to the risks to the public outlined in a recent examination of the management of 50 year old storage ponds at the British Nuclear Fuels Limited facility at Sellafield; the precise nature of the concerns he has raised; if he is satisfied that the improvements promised by management are sufficient to protect persons on the east coast of Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50275/12]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): I welcome the publication of the Report by the UK's National Audit Office Nuclear Decommissioning Authority – Managing risk reduction at Sellafield. Given Ireland's long-standing concerns in relation to the operation of Sellafield, it is important that the Sellafield site and its operations are subject to independent scrutiny, such as that undertaken in the preparation of this Report. I note the UK Nuclear Decommissioning Authority's statement that it will continue to work to improve capability and performance at the site.

The Irish Government's position is that while we chose not to use nuclear power, it is essential, given the risks to people and the environment from a failure in the containment of nuclear material, that nuclear power countries ensure their plants operate in accordance with best international practice and share information in an open and timely manner with neighbouring countries. Ireland regularly raises concerns about the Sellafield sites with the UK authorities in a number of fora, including most recently at the British Irish Council. When I next meet with my UK counterpart, I will again emphasise that we wish to see the decommissioning plan implemented and in the meantime that Sellafield is operated in accordance with best international practice.

There is an ongoing dialogue at official and regulator level with the relevant UK authorities. The UK-Ireland Contact Group on Radiological Matters meets formally twice yearly to discuss nuclear safety and radiological protection. The Radiological Protection Institute of Ireland provides expert advice to Government and continues its programme of monitoring radiation in the environment with the aim of assessing the exposure of the Irish population.

Energy Conservation

198. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government in view of cuts in local government funding, if his attention has been drawn to the fact that voluntary initiatives show that savings of at least 20%, or €23 million per year, could be made in the energy costs of local authorities, which are estimated by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland at €115 million per year; his views that such savings should be made urgently in major cost areas such as waste water treatment, public lighting, local authority buildings and transport efficiencies, by requiring all local authorities to participate in targeted energy efficiency programmes to make these cuts that do not hurt; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50317/12]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): The European Communities (Energy End-Use Efficiency and Energy Services) Regulations 2009 transposed Directive 2006/32/EC into Irish Law. Part 4 of the Regulations outlines a number of obligations relevant to individual public bodies (including local authorities)

in relation to improving their performance with regard to energy efficiency. In this context, Ireland's National Energy Efficiency Action Plan in 2009 included a commitment that the public sector would aim to achieve a 33% improvement in its energy efficiency performance by 2020.

Directive 2006/32/EC and a number of related Directives have recently been recast by the European Commission in the form of the new Energy Efficiency Directive which has recently been adopted. While responsibility for transposition of the new Directive into Irish Law will be a matter for the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources it is expected that the public sector commitment to achieve a 33% improvement in its energy efficiency performance by 2020 will stand.

All public bodies, including local authorities, are responsible for devising and implementing their own plans as necessary to meet their shared obligations towards achieving the 2020 target. A network of local energy agencies is available to advise and assist local authorities in relation to meeting energy efficiency requirements.

Regeneration Projects Funding

199. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will review the decision to cease funding for a project (details supplied); if he will ensure that urgent consideration will be given to the provision of the necessary funding to enable this project continue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50530/12]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): The Clones Regeneration Partnership sought funding to support the employment of a co-ordinator to undertake a programme of development work in preparation for the opening of the Ulster Canal. It is hoped that the opening of the canal will make a major contribution to the economic regeneration of Clones and surrounding areas.

The formal approval given to Clones Regeneration Partnership in June 2009 outlined that funds would be made available to the end of 2012 from the Rural Development Fund, subject to the availability of resources. The support received to date amounts to €93,400 in respect of 2010 and 2011, with a further €85,000 approved for 2012. Accordingly, there was no commitment given beyond the current year in respect of this project.

The purpose of the Rural Development Fund is to finance research, evaluation and pilot actions, so as to provide information and advice for policy makers on important rural development issues; it is not, therefore, intended to be a source of long-term funding.

In response to a request for an extension of the funding to Clones Regeneration Partnership, to support the employment of a project co-ordinator to the end of 2014, I arranged for a review of the funding to be carried out. However, given the overall constraints on available financial resources, there is no scope to accommodate the extension request.

Public Sector Reform Review

200. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the number of bodies that have been abolished or amalgamated by his Department out of the list of bodies listed in the public service reform document of 17 November 2011; the savings or cost of this in 2012; the projected savings or cost of this programme in

2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50538/12]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): The information requested in the question is as follows:

Body	Action	Status
Local Government Management Service Board	Merge Local Government Management Service Board & Local Government Computer Services Board into Local Government Management Agency	Completed - August 2012.
Local Government Computer Services Board		
Limerick Northside Regeneration Agency	Merge Limerick Northside and Limerick Southside Regeneration Agency into Limerick Local Authorities	Completed - July 2012.
Limerick Southside Regeneration Agency		
An Chomhairle Leabharlanna (Library Council)	To be subsumed into an existing public body – (The LGMA)	Completed – November 2012
Comhar (Sustainable Development Council)	To be integrated into the National Economic & Social Council (NESC)	Completed - January 2012.
Interim Housing and Sustainable Communities Agency	This agency incorporates the functions of the Affordable Homes Partnership, National Building Agency and Centre for Housing Research	Completed – August 2012.
Dormant Accounts Board	Discontinue Dormant Accounts Board	Board to be dissolved in December 2012.

The Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2012, is a key enabler in my Department's agency rationalisation programme, under which 21 agencies will be reduced to 10. The Local Government Management Services Board and the Local Government Computer Services Board have merged with the establishment of the Local Government Management Agency (LGMA) in August 2012. The LGMA also takes on the residual functions from An Chomhairle Leabharlanna, which has been dissolved as of 1 November 2012. The Limerick Regeneration Agencies were dissolved on 31 July and their functions taken over by the Office for Regeneration which has been established in Limerick City. The Regeneration Office has been set up with administrative support from Limerick City Council and reports directly to the new City/County Manager. The abolition of the two regeneration agencies, when combined with the merger of the two Limerick local authorities, resulted in three county manager level posts being replaced by one - the new Limerick City and County manager. The Housing and Sustainable Communities Agency (HSCA) was established in August 2012. It rationalises the functions of the National Building Agency (NBA), the Affordable Homes Partnership (AHP) and the Centre for

Housing Research (CHR). The AHP and the CHR have been closed down and the NBA ceased operating in June 2011. Comhar (Sustainable Development Council) was discontinued at the end of 2011 and its sustainable development role has been integrated into the work of the National Economic and Social Council (NESCC). The Dormant Accounts Board will be dissolved by the end of 2012 when the Dormant Accounts (Amendment) Act, 2012 is commenced.

In addition to the bodies listed above, the operations of the Dublin Docklands Development Authority (DDDA) will be wound up by the end of 2013. The transitional period will allow the Authority to progress elements of on-going work and to make the necessary preparations for the migration to new arrangements, to be decided by the Government.

At the end of September 2012, the total staff number employed by State agencies under my Department's aegis was 736.57 whole time equivalents (WTE), a reduction of 214.43 WTE (23 %) as compared to 951 at end 2008. The payroll savings associated with these staff reductions are estimated to be of the order of € 12.4m. The LGMA is financed by way of a levy on local authorities which reduced from €13.9m in 2008 to €11.37m in 2012, a reduction of €2.53m (18.2%). I expect that there will be a further reduction in 2013 in comparison to 2012.

The new library unit in the LGMA, to replace An Chomhairle Leabharlanna, will operate with five staff while An Chomhairle had an original staff complement of eighteen. In order to optimise the savings from the dissolution of An Chomhairle Leabharlanna its Dublin city-centre headquarter buildings have been transferred to the Housing and Sustainable Communities Agency resulting in an annual saving of €150,000 in rental fees for the HSCA. The NBA headquarters was sold in March 2012 for €2.84 million.

The agency rationalisation/efficiency agenda will be kept under review, taking account of the Public Service Reform Plan, insofar as other agencies under my Department's aegis are concerned.

Insurance Industry Issues

201. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his view regarding a submission (details supplied); if there is any mechanism available to the persons through the planning regulations that can permit the persons protect their interests; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50562/12]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): HomeBond is a private limited company providing structural guarantees for new houses and, since November 2008, the HomeBond Insurance Scheme is underwritten by Allianz Insurance. As in the case of any private company its operations, including how it deals with inspections or claims, are a matter for its management and Board of Directors. My Department understands that HomeBond Insurance Services Ltd is regulated by the Central Bank of Ireland.

I appreciate that the circumstances referred to in the Question are difficult and distressing. However, as these concern a private contract between an individual house purchaser and a series of third parties including HomeBond, and the enforcement of contracts is a civil matter, I have no remit in regard to the matters raised.

Local Enterprise Offices Remit

202. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his views on the County and City Enterprise Boards Bill; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50567/12]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): The drafting of a County and City Enterprise Boards Bill, dealing with the dissolution of County and City Enterprise Boards and facilitating the creation of Local Enterprise Offices in local authorities, will be a matter for the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation. I do not anticipate that the Bill will make any provision in relation to Local Development Companies.

The range of reforms set out in Putting People First, to which the Question also refers, will draw on the capacity of both the local development and the local government sectors. While these reforms will be challenging for all sectors, they are targeted at greater efficiency and effectiveness of services for citizens and communities.

In the past, significant funding has been provided to local development bodies to deliver programmes on behalf of the State and Putting People First envisages a continuation of the local development model. However, the delivery of local and community development activities will have an increased focus on front-line services with greater efficiencies in the administration of programmes.

Departmental Staff Promotions

203. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the number of promotions made in his Department to principal officer higher scale, principal officer standard scale, assistant principal officer higher scale, assistant principal officer standard scale, higher executive officer scale, executive office scale and staff officer scale; the total for all of his Department; if he will provide a breakdown for for 2009, 2010, 2011 and to date in 2012; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50975/12]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): The number of promotions made in my Department in the period 2009/2012 to the specified grades are set out in the following table:

Promoted Grade	2009	2010	2011	2012
Principal Officer	0	1	0	2
Assistant Principal Officer	0	0	0	2

No promotions have been made to the grade of Higher Executive Officer, Executive Officer or Staff Officer since 2009. In addition, three Assistant Principal Officers and three Higher Executive Officers have been awarded allowances for the performance of duties at a higher grade in 2012. It was only in limited and exceptional circumstances and with the prior approval and sanction from the Department of Finance and now the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, that this small number of internal promotions and allowances were awarded. These were necessary to deal with priority business areas taking account of staff departures due to retirement and in preparation for Ireland’s Presidency of the EU in early 2013. Assignments to Higher Scales are made in accordance with relevant Department of Finance/Public Expenditure and Reform Circulars and are not considered to be promotions. The following table gives the number of higher scale assignments made in the relevant grades from 2009 to date.

	2009	2010	2011	2012
Principal Officer (Higher Scale)	3	2	1	1
Assistant Principal Officer (Higher Scale)	2	2	0	0
Higher Executive Officer (Higher Scale)	1	1	0	0
Executive Officer (Higher Scale)	2	1	0	0

There is no Higher Scale for the grade of Staff Officer.

Crime Prevention

204. **Deputy Dominic Hannigan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the steps the Gardaí are taking in an area (details supplied) to reduce crime; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50225/12]

205. **Deputy Dominic Hannigan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of arrests that have been made in an area (details supplied) in the past two years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50226/12]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I propose to take Questions Nos. 204 and 205 together.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that the area referred to is in the Ashbourne Garda District. I am further informed that the area is subject to regular patrols by local uniformed and plain clothes personnel, augmented by the Regular Unit and the Detective Unit, together with the Divisional Traffic Unit and the Regional Support Unit as required.

Local Garda management closely monitors such patrols, and other operational strategies in place, in conjunction with crime trends and policing needs of the communities in these areas to ensure optimum use is made of Garda resources to provide the best possible Garda service to the public. While the situation is being kept under review, Garda management is satisfied that a full and comprehensive policing service is being delivered to the communities in the areas concerned and that the current structures in place deliver an effective and efficient policing service.

The Deputy will be aware that the Garda Commissioner has put Operation Fiacla in place in order to address incidents of burglary, aggravated burglaries and related offences throughout the country. Operation Fiacla is intelligence driven and specific burglary initiatives have been implemented in each Garda Region to target suspect offenders. I am informed that as of 19 October, 2493 persons have been arrested and 1404 persons have been charged with burglary offences under Operation Fiacla.

An Garda Síochána also places great emphasis on the importance of community partnerships in preventing and detecting crime, and maintaining a safe environment for everyone. An Garda Síochána continues to invest time and energy in these partnerships and relationships to the benefit of all.

In this regard, during September the Garda Commissioner launched the second national

public awareness week this year under the 'Garda Supporting Safer Communities Campaign'. This important campaign highlights a range of key issues, in particular burglary prevention. The primary objective of this Garda Community Safety Campaign is to engage with, and raise awareness within communities of initiatives aimed at preventing crime, reducing the fear of crime and promoting community safety.

I am further informed that the number of persons arrested and in custody in Ashbourne Garda station was 573 in 2010, 497 in 2011 and 450 in 2012, up to 8 November. These figures may include arrests made in areas other than Ashbourne, inclusive of the Garda Sub-Districts of Duleek, Dunboyne, Dunshaughlin and Laytown, and brought to Ashbourne Garda Station for custody purposes.

Prisoner Numbers

206. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of children under 18 years in St. Patrick's Institution, Dublin, on 8 November 2012; the date in which these children will be moved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50448/12]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I can advise the Deputy that on 8th November, 2012 there were 32 seventeen year old prisoners in custody in St Patrick's Institution, 11 of which were held on remand.

As you will be aware the Government committed, in the Programme for Government to remove 16 and 17 year old offenders completely from the adult prison system. In this context, the practice of sending 16 year old boys to St Patrick's ceased on 1st May, 2012. From that date, all newly remanded or sentenced 16 year olds have been detained in the children detention facilities in Oberstown. The Government also sanctioned the provision of the necessary funding for a new detention facility at Oberstown. This is due for completion in mid-2014. These matters were all dealt with by me in cooperation with my colleague Frances Fitzgerald TD, Minister for Children and Youth Affairs.

In the interim, the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs has agreed to examine the feasibility of accommodating some categories of 17 year old boys in Oberstown on a phased basis earlier than mid 2014, if possible. Arrangements are also being made for a number of care staff from the Children Detention Schools to work on placement in St Patrick's Institution alongside Prison Staff. It is intended that this will take place in the near future.

Garda Stations Closures

207. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if his attention has been drawn to the concerns of the Garda Representative Association and the Irish Farmers Association regarding the closure of Garda stations; and if he has brought these concerns to the Garda Commissioner. [50449/12]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): Any proposals for the closure of Garda stations must be contained in the annual policing plan prepared by the Garda 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.

Everyone is aware of the arguments that have been made for the retention of all Garda stations, but I believe that most people would accept that, whatever debate there might be about the precise number needed, it would not be sensible to keep open every single Garda station we inherited on the foundation of the State. What matters is not simply a bricks-and-mortar presence in every locality, but rather the delivery of the most effective policing service possible to the public in that area.

It is therefore entirely sensible that the Commissioner should examine the potential for enhancing how policing services are delivered to communities across the country, including in particular how best to deploy Gardaí on operational duties so that they make the greatest possible contribution to the policing service. That examination must necessarily involve an assessment of such factors as the level and type of activity in Garda stations, the rate and types of crime in the areas concerned, and the scope for redeploying Gardaí from station work on to patrols or other operational duties.

On the publication of the policing plan for 2013 there will be an opportunity for Deputies to debate these issues in greater detail.

Prison Staff

208. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he plans a review of training for prison officers employed in St. Patrick's Institution, Dublin; if disciplinary action has been initiated against any member of staff following publication of a report by the Ombudsman for Children on children in St. Patrick's Institution. [50450/12]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I have been assured by the Director General of the Irish Prison Service that the training needs of prison staff are constantly subject to review by the dedicated team attached to the Irish Prison Service Training and Development Centre.

All Recruit Prison Officers complete an awareness programme on "Young People in Prison" as part of their initial training in the Irish Prison Service Training and Development Centre. The Prison Service Training and Development Centre has also developed a "Staff Working with Young People Awareness Programme" which has recently been delivered to the prison officers working with children in St. Patrick's Institution. Following this initial awareness programme further training has been identified and a comprehensive "Staff Working with Young People Awareness Programme" is currently being developed by the Prison Service Training and Development Centre which will be delivered to all staff working in St. Patrick's Institution before the end of this year.

The Management Team in St Patrick's completed an ILM Level 5 (FETAC Level 6) Leadership Award in September this year and between October and December 2012, all St Patrick's Management staff (Governors and Chief Officers) will have completed the "Leading Together" IMI Situational Leadership Programme. This is a senior executive programme developed as a means of learning new, and improving existing skills in - leadership; motivation; skills for leading teams and groups; and leadership skills for major organisational change.

In addition, a specific "Children First" training programme has also been designed, in conjunction with the Health Services Executive which is intended for delivery to staff attached to St Patrick's during the coming months.

The appointment of two training Liaison Officers to the Mountjoy Campus under the management of the Training and Development Centre will be completed shortly and will assist in

the delivering and managing localised training for staff in St. Patrick's Institution. In addition, a number of staff in St. Patrick's Institution have been developed as Training Support Instructors and they will assist in the delivery of identified localised training.

The Irish Prison Service in consultation with the Irish Human Rights Commission has also developed a Human Rights in Prison Course and the first of these joint courses will be delivered to Training Staff in January 2013 and will then be rolled out to all prison staff.

As the Deputy may be aware a new complaints procedure was introduced on 1 November 2012 in all prisons which involved the establishment of a panel of 22 external Investigators. I have instructed the Director General of the Irish Prison Service to direct the new Investigators to commence an examination of previous complaints in St Patrick's Institution. I can assure the Deputy that should breaches of discipline be found to have occurred, the officers responsible will be subject to the disciplinary process in accordance with the Prison (Disciplinary Code for Officers) Rules.

Prisoner Welfare

209. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the Ombudsman for Children has stated in relation to St. Patrick's Institution that senior officials in his Department had an attitude of indifference towards the young offenders and had no respect for them because they had broken the law; and if he will respond to her comments. [50451/12]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I can assure the Deputy that I greatly valued the report prepared by the Ombudsman for Children, Emily Logan, last year following her discussions with young people detained in St Patrick's. Her work is much appreciated and she can be assured of my full support.

My Department also appreciates the work of the Ombudsman for Children. Any issues relating to the health and welfare of children and young persons are treated with the utmost seriousness by my Department; Ms. Logan and the work of her Office are held in the highest of respect. It was never my Department's intention to give any other impression.

In this context, in July of this year, I extended the remit of the Ombudsman for Children to include the examination of complaints from children detained in St Patrick's Institution. This is something she had been seeking for a number of years that previous Governments had refused to authorise. She can be assured of my Department's full support and will be facilitated in every way possible.

Services for People with Disabilities

210. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he met with the Department of Finance on the issue of ensuring that persons with disabilities and their families and carer's are not affected by cuts in Budget 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50452/12]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I would like to inform the Deputy that payments to persons with disabilities and their families and carers do not fall under the remit of the Department of Justice and Equality.

Road Traffic Offences

211. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding illegal parking (details supplied) in Dublin 5 [50456/12]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I am informed by the Garda authorities that the location referred to is within the Coolock Garda District. Local Garda management is aware of difficulties in relation to parking in the area.

I am further informed that the area referred to is patrolled by uniform and plain-clothes units, including the Community Policing Unit, supplemented as required by Traffic Corps personnel. The Garda authorities have also advised that a designated Community Garda who patrols the area is in contact with local residents.

I am also advised that An Garda Síochána regularly conduct enforcement operations to ensure that road traffic legislation is complied with. Members of An Garda Síochána issue fixed charge notices to vehicles that are parked illegally or causing obstructions.

I am assured that local Garda management continue to monitor this area and where breaches of the law are detected the appropriate action is taken.

Commissions of Investigation

212. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will provide a commission of inquiry into the death of a person (details supplied) and the serious allegations of a cover up. [50457/12]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I am informed by the Garda authorities that the examination of the incident referred to by the Deputy is ongoing. The Commissioner has assured me that each and every line of inquiry is being or will be pursued. Upon receipt of a final report from the Commissioner I will review the situation.

I understand that the officers carrying out the examination are continuing to keep the family members of the deceased updated on progress. While I fully appreciate the concerns of the family, in any case where criminal behaviour is suspected it is only through a Garda investigation, and where evidence of criminal wrongdoing is available through the submission of a file by the Gardaí to the Director of Public Prosecutions, that persons can be brought fully to account. I'm sure the Deputy will agree that, in the first instance, we need to allow the present Garda examination to proceed to its conclusion.

Public Sector Reform Review

213. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of bodies that have been abolished or amalgamated by his Department out of the list of bodies listed in the public service reform document of 17 November 2011; the savings or cost of this in 2012; the projected savings or cost of this programme in 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50543/12]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): As the Deputy is aware, the radical streamlining of State bodies is a key deliverable of the Public Service Reform Plan, published in November 2011. This streamlining includes the rationalisation of 48 bodies by the

end of 2012, as well as the critical review of a further 46 bodies to take place by the end of June 2012. Details of the bodies involved are set out in Appendices IIa and IIb of the Plan which can be found at: <http://reformplan.per.gov.ie/files/2012/01/Public-Service-Reform-28112011.pdf>.

On 31 October 2012, my colleague, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, announced an update in relation to the programme of rationalisation of State bodies.

While these rationalisations will deliver savings to the taxpayer, the real benefits lie in the simplification of the administrative landscape, thereby ensuring greater accountability, less duplication of effort and more transparent lines of responsibility of public servants. It is not possible at this time to specify anticipated savings on an individual State body basis. However, the Public Service Reform Plan indicated that across the public service as a whole, savings of 20 million euro in enhanced service efficiencies and value-for-money are envisaged from the rationalisation programme.

With regard to State bodies under the aegis of my own Department, the bodies which are to be rationalised, amalgamated or abolished in 2012 are:

Equality Tribunal (Rationalise the industrial relations/employee rights institutions - Labour Court, Labour Relations Commission, Employee Appeals Tribunal, National Employment Rights Authority and Equality Tribunal into single agency). This overall rationalisation of industrial relations institutions is being lead by my colleague, the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation. The General Scheme of a Bill to provide for this measure has been approved by Government. Our two Departments have agreed that administrative responsibility for the Tribunal will transfer to the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation from 1 January 2013.

Equality Authority, Human Rights Commission (Merge to form new Human Rights and Equality Commission). I published the General Scheme of a Bill to replace the Equality Authority and the Human Rights Commission with a new Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission on 5 June 2012. The Bill is currently being drafted and it is intended to have the legislation in place early next year. In parallel, arrangements are being made to select members of the new Commission. This is being handled by an independent Selection Panel set up for that purpose. Advertisements inviting applications were published last Sunday, with a deadline of 29 November for submission of applications. The successful applicants will be appointed to the two existing bodies, pending enactment of the necessary legislation to effect the merger. This will ensure that the two organisations can start to operate as a cohesive whole, with a transition programme being prepared and put in place, that the board(s) can commence preparing a Strategic Plan for the new body and that work can be taken forward rapidly on the staffing review envisaged in the Working Group report.

With regard to those bodies under the aegis of my Department, subject to critical review, and which recommend proceeding with the measure (i.e. to be achieved by end 2013), these are as follows:

Forensic Science Laboratory: The Forensic Science Laboratory is to be brought within the ambit of the State Laboratory. No savings or costs are likely to arise in 2012. A working group is to be established to develop and work through areas of savings and future synergies.

Prison Visiting Committees (Reduce or merge Visiting Committees as there is now a Prison Inspectorate). The Government has approved the drafting of a General Scheme of an Inspection of Places of Detention Bill, which will include provisions to make Visiting Committees more effective, while they continue their role of visiting prisons, meeting with prisoners, and liaising

on their behalf with prison authorities. A link will be established between the Visiting Committees and the Inspector of Prisons. As part of these plans, it is intended to expand the role of the Inspector of Prisons. Under the proposed arrangements, it is my intention that Visiting Committees would be able to report any urgent or major matter to the Inspector at any time. Subject to competing legislative priorities, it is expected that the General Scheme will be published by the end of the year. When work on preparation of the General Scheme has been completed, I will be seeking Government approval for its publication to facilitate a consultation process in advance of drafting and publication of the Bill.

Property Registration Authority (Merger the Valuation Office, Ordnance Survey Ireland and the Property Registration Authority). Following the Government approval of the recommendation of the Critical Review on this proposal that a merger should proceed, work is commencing to advance this proposal.

Reception and Integration Agency, Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner and Refugee Appeals Tribunal (Rationalise various Refugee Structures). Consolidation of refugee structures will be addressed through the Immigration, Residence and Protection Bill. The Bill will provide for the Office of the Refugee Applications Commission (ORAC) to be subsumed into INIS - the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service. The Bill will also provide for the replacement of the Refugee Appeals Tribunal with the new Protection Review Tribunal.

Court Accommodation Provision

214. **Deputy Paudie Coffey** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress that has been made in respect of the renovation of Waterford Courthouse as announced earlier this year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50554/12]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): In July, the Government announced an infrastructure stimulus package which includes seven courthouse projects. As the Deputy is aware, under the provisions of the Courts Service Act 1998, management of the courts, including the provision of accommodation for court sittings, is the responsibility of the Courts Service which is independent in exercising its functions. However, in order to be of assistance to the Deputy, I have had enquiries made and the Courts Service has informed me that discussions are ongoing with the Office of Public Works and the National Development Finance Agency with a view to progressing these projects.

The Waterford project involves a refurbishment and extension of the existing courthouse. I am informed that the current position is that outline design work has been undertaken and discussions are ongoing with Waterford City Council in relation to the site.

Departmental Staff Promotions

215. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of promotions made in his Department to principal officer higher scale, principal officer standard scale, assistant principal officer higher scale, assistant principal officer standard scale, higher executive officer scale, executive office scale and staff officer scale; the total for all of his Department; if he will provide a breakdown for for 2009, 2010, 2011 and to date in 2012; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50980/12]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): In respect of the number of substantive promotions made in my Department for the grades and years identified by the Dep-

uty the following table provides the relevant details:

Year	PO	APO	HEO	EO	SO
2009	1	1	33	-	-
2010	4	3	-	7	-
2011	1	-	1	-	-
To date 2012	1	6	5	2	-

I understand that the promotions to date in 2012 are temporary in nature with specific expiry dates applying to each of them. In addition, the position of Director of Operations in the Prisons Service was filled on a substantive basis following a competition by a serving Principal Officer.

As the Deputy will be aware in March 2009 the Government introduced a moratorium on the filling of vacancies in the public service, either by way of recruitment or promotion. Sanction must be obtained from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to effect any promotions. I am advised the necessary sanctions to make the above promotions were obtained.

Defence Forces Reorganisation

216. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Defence the number of staff at McKee Barracks that were instructed that they would have to move to Athlone by 1 December; the basis for this decision and the financial supports available to the staff involved. [50303/12]

217. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Defence if he will provide details of the personnel rank and so on to be moved from McKee Barracks in Dublin as part his Departments reorganisation of the Permanent Defence Forces; the location to which the personnel are being moved; and the provisions being put in place to support the personnel and their families who are being asked to relocate. [50440/12]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): I propose to take Questions Nos. 216 and 217 together.

The implementation of the major reorganisation of the Defence Forces in order to maintain their operational capability is progressing in full consultation with serving personnel and their Representative Associations. All options to avoid the need for personnel to relocate are being explored as part of this process. Personnel are being offered the opportunity for reassignment within their current locations where this is feasible, together with opportunities for re-training and re-skilling. In addition, a review system has been put in place whereby personnel who are unhappy with a proposed relocation can seek a review of a decision. Inevitably, given the scale of the reorganisation, it will be necessary for some staff to move to new locations.

The creation of a new two Brigade structure for the Army under the reorganisation has resulted in Combat Support Units being reduced from nine units to six. The Field Engineer companies based in McKee Barracks fall into this category, and the Headquarters element and Field Engineer Company are being relocated to Custume Barracks, Athlone. The 2 Field Artillery Regiment based in McKee Barracks are also relocating as part of this process.

Pending the full rollout of the reorganisation plan it is not possible to say how many personnel can be facilitated though the reassignment process. However, there is no question of families being moved or being required to move arising from the reorganisation and this is a matter for each individual to decide. The reality is that many Defence Forces personnel currently as

signed to McKee barracks are not resident in Dublin and commute on a daily basis,

which is a common feature across both the public and private sector of a modern, flexible and mobile working population in Ireland today. The reassignments have in fact offered the opportunity for many personnel currently based in McKee Barracks to move to locations which are more favourable to their personal circumstances. In this regard 42 personnel across all ranks up to Commandant are taking the opportunity to relocate on a voluntary basis.

It is important to restate that the reassignment, promotion and appeals processes are still ongoing and that the numbers of personnel to be mandatorily reassigned remains fluid at this point making it impossible to give final definitive figures at this juncture.

All members of the Defence Forces reassigned under the Defence Forces Reorganisation Plan 2012 are entitled to Change of Station Allowance in circumstances where they meet the qualifying criteria. The Defence Forces Personnel Support Service has a representative in every Barrack or Installation to which personnel are being reassigned and these individuals are in a position, using both internal and external resources to provide the necessary supports to the redeploying personnel and their families if applicable, as was previously provided during recent Barrack closures and redeployments.

Public Sector Reform Review

218. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Defence the number of bodies that have been abolished or amalgamated by his Department out of the list of bodies listed in the Public Service Reform document of 17 November 2011; the savings or cost of this in 2012; the projected savings or cost of this programme in 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50536/12]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): The Civil Defence Board is the only body under the aegis of my Department which was identified in the Public Service Reform Plan as a body to be abolished. The Civil Defence Board was established in 2003 following the enactment of the Civil Defence Act 2002. Legislation is currently before the Oireachtas for the dissolution of the Board and the transfer of its functions back to the Department of Defence. This is anticipated to realise an annual saving of €60K in running costs.

The budget for the Civil Defence Board in 2012 is €5.585m.

Departmental Staff Promotions

219. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Defence the number of promotions made in his Department to principal officer higher scale, principal officer standard scale, assistant principal officer higher scale, assistant principal officer standard scale, higher executive officer scale, executive office scale and staff officer scale; the total for all of his Department; if he will provide a breakdown for for 2009, 2010, 2011 and to date in 2012; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50973/12]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): Details of promotions and assignments to higher scales as requested by the Deputy are set out in the following table:

Grade	2009	2010	2011	2012
Principal Officer Higher	-	-	-	-
Principal Officer Standard	-	2	-	1
Assistant Principal Officer Higher Scale	-	-	-	1
Assistant Principal Officer Standard Scale	1	1	-	2
Higher Executive Officer Scale	-	-	-	3
Executive Officer Scale	-	-	-	-
Staff Officer Scale	1	-	-	-
Total	2	3	-	7

I am satisfied that my Department has only undertaken promotions where a critical business need was identified and that it will continue to do so having regard to the moratorium on recruitment and promotions.

Commonage Division

220. **Deputy Tom Hayes** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he plans to change the stocking level on commonage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50206/12]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Commonage Framework Plans, first published in 2002, have been reviewed to take account of the current vegetative condition of commonages nationally. This review which replaces the Commonage Framework Plans has been carried out by the National Parks and Wildlife Service in co-operation with my Department on a commonage LPIS parcel basis and sets a minimum and maximum number of ewe equivalents (EE) required to graze the commonage parcel to ensure that it is maintained in Good Agricultural and Environmental Conditions (GAEC). I am currently considering an implementation plan to take account of the changed stocking levels.

My Department is trying to reconcile the reality of commonages with the EU requirements of GAEC. We will work with the farmers, farm organisations and others to design a practical solution.

Derogation Applications

221. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a decision will issue on an application for derogation in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50219/12]

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

is being notified that the derogation application was successful. Payment will accordingly issue shortly to the nominated bank account of the person named.

Rural Environment Protection Scheme Payments

222. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a rural environment protection scheme 4 will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50220/12]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named commenced REPS 4 in December 2007 and has received payments for the first four years of their contract.

REPS 4 is a measure under the current 2007-13 Rural Development Programme and is subject to EU Regulations which require detailed administrative checks on all applications to be completed before any payments can issue. This process is under way for 2012 REPS 4 applications and I expect that payments will commence shortly. In the event that any issues arise on the file of the person named, officials in my Department will be in direct contact with the person named.

Single Payment Scheme Payments

223. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason payment has not issued to a person (details supplied) in County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50329/12]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Payments have not issued in this case because the person named did not make an application under the Single Payment Scheme for 2011 or 2012.

Single Payment Scheme Payments

224. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding single farm payments and headage payments in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Limerick; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50336/12]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named is an applicant under the 2012 Single Payment and Disadvantaged Area Schemes.

In order to meet EU requirements, the application concerned was one of a number which was selected for inspection. The outcome of the inspection process, which, in this case, included a ground inspection, was that an over claim on a parcel was confirmed. The applicant was informed of the resultant adjustment by letter dated 12th October and also of the normal right of appeal.

Rural Environment Protection Scheme Payments

225. **Deputy Paul J. Connaughton** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payment on the rural environment protection scheme 2012 will issue in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Galway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50442/12]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named commenced REPS 4 in January 2010 and received payments for the first two years of their contract.

REPS 4 is a measure under the current 2007-13 Rural Development Programme and is subject to EU Regulations which require detailed administrative checks on all applications to be completed before any payments can issue. This process is under way for 2012 REPS 4 applications and I expect that payments will commence shortly. In the event that any issues arise on the file of the person named, officials in my Department will be in direct contact with the person named.

Milk Quota Cessation

226. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the contingencies in place after milk quotas are abolished in 2015. [50443/12]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Ireland strongly supported the decision to abolish milk quotas with effect from 1st April 2015 on the basis that quotas were widely regarded by both the Irish dairy sector and market analysts as a brake on the potential of the sector to respond positively to market opportunities. I expect the abolition of quotas to facilitate an expansion in the sector and through the Food Harvest 2020 Report the industry has set itself an ambitious target for a 50% increase in milk production by 2020. For my part I have been working on a number of fronts to prepare the industry for the move to a quota free environment.

More than 85% of Irish dairy production is exported, and the price of milk in Ireland is ultimately determined by global demand and supply. In that regard I have been endeavouring to raise the profile of the Irish dairy sector in third country markets, for example through trade visits to the US and China, and also through ongoing engagement with potential purchasers of Irish dairy products, at both political and official level.

A key element of this market strategy is to optimise the already positive green image of Ireland in order to create a point of differentiation for Irish dairy products on international markets. In this context, stakeholders are at present engaged, through Bord Bia, in technical discussions to establish a dairy sustainability and quality scheme, while at processing level, Bord Bia's Origin Green Programme is providing a vehicle for industry to commit itself to sustainability targets by reducing energy inputs, minimising overall carbon footprint and mitigating the impact on the environment. This pro-active approach to environmental sustainability has a strong resonance with procurement strategists in the many multi-national food companies who are interested in using Ireland as a source of high quality food ingredients and processed products.

Of course the industry itself has a responsibility to focus its efforts on market and product development. Supported by Government, the Irish dairy sector has succeeded in positioning itself as a major international player, and in recent months we have seen industry

announcements in relation to the development of supply arrangements between Irish companies and multi-national players in third countries, and the development of value added products which can maximise the value of our dairy output.

At farm level my Department, in conjunction with Teagasc, has been working, through research activities and through the Dairy Efficiency Programme, to develop the skills and knowledge necessary to reduce costs on farm and improve efficiency, in order to better equip farmers to deal with volatility in dairy markets. In this context I am confident that following quota abolition, co-ops and their members will develop the kind of robust contractual arrangements which will secure supply into the future.

Underpinning all of this, I will continue to negotiate strongly to ensure that the post 2013 CAP continues to provide effective support for Irish farmers and that a market supports will remain in place to provide an adequate safety net to protect against the worst extremes of price volatility.

Taking all this into account, I am confident that the collaborative efforts of Government, the processing industry and the producers will ensure a thriving and sustainable dairy sector that can use the opportunity afforded by the abolition of quotas to fully leverage the natural advantage of Ireland's grass-based production system.

Commonage Division

227. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the assistance available from his Department to farmers with rights to commonage lands (details supplied) in County Kerry that are been over grazed and overstocked by other farmers with no rights. [50445/12]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): It is the responsibility of each farmer who has commonage shares to ensure that these commonages are grazed in such a manner that they are kept in Good Agricultural Environmental Condition (GAEC). Where farmers who have no rights on such commonages are causing overgrazing on these commonages, the situation should be brought to Departments attention. However, as this is a civil matter, it is the responsibility of the legal shareholders to ensure that they address this situation.

Public Sector Reform Review

228. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of bodies that have been abolished or amalgamated by his Department out of the list of bodies listed in the public service reform document of 17 November 2011; the savings or cost of this in 2012; the projected savings or cost of this programme in 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50532/12]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Of the forty six bodies listed as candidates for critical review by end June 2012 in the Government's Public Service Reform Plan published in November 2011 by the Department for Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER), three from this Department were reviewed for possible abolition or merger.

1. National Milk Agency – to consider abolishing or merging with Bord Bia;
2. Irish Marine Development Office – functions to be subsumed into the Marine Institute;
3. Bord Iascaigh Mhara (BIM) – to consider subsuming certain functions into this Department. (The marketing functions of BIM had been transferred to Bord Bia prior to the period in question).

Following the outcomes of these reviews it has been decided that the National Milk Agency will not be abolished nor merged with Bord Bia. BIM's functions will not be subsumed into this Department and as the Irish Marine Development Office is already integrated with the Marine Institute from an administrative perspective no further action is required.

Common Agricultural Policy Reform

229. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the amount of money that would be available for redistribution amongst lower income farmers under the proposal published by him in relation to common agricultural policy reform and the single farm payment if all payments were capped at €45,000 and €40,000 respectively; the number that would be affected in each county by the ceilings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50547/12]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): I presume the Deputy is seeking information in relation to the post-2013 CAP reform proposals. My Department has modelled various CAP reform proposals using the 2010 Single Payment Scheme (SPS) database of actual payments to farmers in that year, rather than entitlements. Analysis of this database shows the following:

Around 3,625 farmers received single payments in excess of €40,000 in 2010. Capping the maximum payment to these farmers at €40,000 would in theory provide €77.8 million for redistribution.

Around 2,730 farmers received single payments in excess of €45,000 in 2010. Capping the maximum payment to these farmers at €45,000 would in theory provide €62 million for redistribution.

Data on the number of farmers who would be affected by such ceilings in each county is not yet available.

Harbours and Piers Expenditure

230. **Deputy Paudie Coffey** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the plans he has to develop Dunmore East Harbour, County Waterford, which falls under the remit of his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50559/12]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The harbour at Dunmore East was designated as a Fishery Harbour Centre by virtue of the Fishery Harbour Centres Act 1968 (as amended). My Department has responsibility for its maintenance and development.

I am conscious of the valuable contribution the harbour makes to the fishing industry and

indeed to the local community in terms of the support the harbour infrastructure provides to the development of the tourist industry.

My officials regularly meet with the various stakeholders at the Fishery Harbour Centre in order to share information and to get their views on the potential future development of the harbour. I can confirm that this year alone my Department provided funding of €563,500 for

maintenance, development and upgrading works at the Dunmore East Fishery Harbour Centre as part of its Fishery Harbour and Coastal Infrastructure Development Programme. The provision of funding for the future development of the harbour will be given consideration when drafting the 2013 Fishery Harbour and Coastal Infrastructure Development Programme.

Departmental Staff Promotions

231. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of promotions made in his Department to principal officer higher scale, principal officer standard scale, assistant principal officer higher scale, assistant principal officer standard scale, higher executive officer scale, executive office scale and staff officer scale; the total for all of his Department; if he will provide a breakdown for for 2009, 2010, 2011 and to date in 2012; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50969/12]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): In response to the Deputy’s question I have detailed the information requested in the following table:

Year	Pre-Promotion Grade	Post-Promotion Grade	Number Promoted
2009	Staff OfficerClerical Officer	Executive OfficerEx-ecutive Officer	11
2010	Assistant Principal Officer	Principal Officer	1
2011	Assistant Principal OfficerHigher Ex-ecutive Officer	Principal OfficerAs-sistant Principal Officer	12
2012	Assistant Princi-pal OfficerHigher Executive OfficerEx-ecutive Officer	Principal OfficerAs-sistant Principal Of-ficerHigher Execu-tive Officer	261

In addition to the promotions listed above, the following higher scale assignments were made in the period in question:

Year	Grade	Number
2010	Principal OfficerAssistant Principal Officer	16
2011	Principal OfficerAssistant Principal Officer	33

National Educational Welfare Board Remit

232. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will provide details of the annual salary currently being paid to the interim chief executive

officer of the National Educational Welfare Board; if the interim CEO retired from his previous position as assistant chief inspector of the Department of Education and Skills; and if so is he in receipt of his public service pension. [50432/12]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I have been advised that the National Educational Welfare Board has recently appointed an Interim Chief Executive Officer on a fixed term contract. The Interim Chief Executive Officer had retired from his position as an Assistant Chief Inspector in the Department of Education and Skills prior to his consideration for appointment by the Board.

The pension abatement rules with regard to the re-employment within the public sector of retired public servants apply to this appointment. Under the terms of the sanction received from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform the salary scale for the Interim Chief Executive Officer post is €97,935 - €117,407. Government policy requires that the first point of the scale is applicable in the case of new entrants.

Referendum Expenditure

233. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the amount spent by her Department in the establishment and maintenance of the children's referendum website discontinued on 8 November 2012; the amount spent by her Department in the design, printing and distribution of any children's referendum leaflets published by her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [50424/12]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): To date, an amount of €9,693 has been spent on the Department's Children's Referendum website which includes costs in respect of website development, maintenance, design and translation of material into the Irish language. An amount of €428,487 has been spent to date on the Department's Children's Referendum information booklet which includes costs in respect of design, printing, distribution and translation of material into the Irish language. These are not the final costs of either the website or the booklet as further invoices are expected in respect of each.

Public Sector Reform Review

234. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of bodies that have been abolished or amalgamated by her Department out of the list of bodies listed in the public service reform document of 17 November 2011; the savings or cost of this in 2012; the projected savings or cost of this programme in 2013; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [50534/12]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I would like to inform the Deputy there are four agencies which are funded by the Exchequer through my Department's Vote. These are the Adoption Authority of Ireland (AAI); the Family Support Agency (FSA); the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) and the Ombudsman for Children's Office (OCO).

In July 2011, the Government decided that the Family Mediation Service should transfer from the Family Support Agency to the Legal Aid Board. This is in line with the Government's commitment to facilitate the use of mediation in family disputes in order to speed up the legal process, reduce costs and ameliorate the stress of contested court proceedings. On foot of the

Government decision, the Family Support Agency established a transition project team to transfer 45 individuals, or 24.29 WTEs, in some 16 locations throughout the country and an annual allocation of almost €3m to the Legal Aid Board. On 26 October 2011, the Minister for Justice and Equality signed the commencement order for Part 16 of the Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2011 which gave effect to the transfer from 1 November 2011.

I can inform the Deputy that the FSA is due to be merged with the new Child and Family Support Agency (CFSA) which will be established in 2013. The National Educational Welfare Board is also due to be merged with the CFSA. Legislation for the establishment of the CFSA is being prepared by my Department as a priority. It is anticipated that the Bill will be published and enacted in the course of this session and it is my intention that the CFSA will assume statutory responsibility for services for children and families in January 2013.

It is proposed to merge the back office functions of the Ombudsman for Children's Office into the Ombudsman/Information Commissioner's Office and discussions are taking place around this with a view to this taking place by the end of 2012.

In relation to 2012, no savings have been made as these proposals have not been implemented yet. At this stage it is not possible to quantify the actual savings that will arise for 2013 as a result of these developments as discussions and preparatory work are still ongoing. The questions of savings and efficiencies will be considered in the context of the development of the CFSA in 2013.

It should be noted that following enactment of the Child Care Amendment Act 2011 the Children's Act Advisory Board was subsequently dissolved by means of the commencement by the Minister of Health of Part 6 of the Child Amendment Act 2011.

Departmental Staff Promotions

235. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of promotions made in her Department to principal officer higher scale, principal officer standard scale, assistant principal officer higher scale, assistant principal officer standard scale, higher executive officer scale, executive office scale and staff officer scale; the total for all of her Department; if she will provide a breakdown for for 2009, 2010, 2011 and to date in 2012; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50971/12]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I can confirm that there have been no internal promotions at my Department since its establishment in June 2011.

Medical Card Applications

236. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite an application for a medical card in respect of a person (details supplied). [50346/12]

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.

Home Care Packages

237. **Deputy Peter Mathews** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide temporary health care assistance to cover home help when health care assistants are on holiday leave so that no elderly person is left without assistance during holiday periods [50212/12]

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

238. **Deputy Arthur Spring** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the waiting time for patients for a posterior instrumented correction procedure to be carried at Crumlin Hospital, Dublin, and when a person (details supplied) in County Kerry will be given a confirmed date to have the procedure carried out; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50229/12]

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 Application Numbers

239. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Health the number of medical card applications that have been successfully reviewed and awarded after failing a means test; the number of these that are patients who are in need of continuous mental health treatment; if he will provide a list of conditions that have been considered eligible by the Chief Medical Officer; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50258/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): I am advised by the HSE that in total, 11,800 discretionary medical cards and GP visit cards were issued or renewed from January to September 2012.

Medical cards are not awarded to any particular group of patients on the basis of a specific medical condition. Under the provisions of the Health Act 1970, eligibility for health services in Ireland is based primarily on residency and means. Unsuccessful medical card applicants who indicate that they suffer from a particular medical condition are referred to the Medical Officer for consideration on a medical discretionary basis. The Medical Officer considers the medical condition and financial circumstances of the applicant on a case by case basis before making a decision. There is no breakdown of medical conditions currently available in relation to discretionary medical card / GP visit cards issued.

Mobility Allowance Decision

240. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Health his views regarding the office of the Ombudsman Report entitled Too Old to be Equal; the recommendations therein; and if he has begun the process of changing the mobility allowance scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50259/12]

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 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.

Ambulance Service Provision

241. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for Health the total cost of the ambulance service in West Cork for each of the past five years. [50260/12]

242. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for Health the estimated increase in the cost of providing improved ambulance service in west Cork under the new proposed system to be rolled out next year. [50261/12]

243. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for Health the number of patients that were admitted to hospital for each of the following time scales, for each of the past 24 months: one night, two nights or five nights plus after being transported there by emergency ambulance from West Cork [50262/12]

244. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for Health the number of patients that were discharged from care of the Health Service Executive after being transported to hospital by emergency ambulance from west Cork less than 24 hours after arriving to the hospital. [50263/12]

245. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for Health the average time paramedics will spend at Cork University Hospital after arriving with a patient to admit to the hospital before they are free to depart back to west Cork to provide ambulance cover in that area. [50264/12]

246. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for Health the number of routine non emergency patient transport requests that have been carried out by emergency ambulance for each of the past 24 months by emergency ambulances; the average time each of these services will last and the number of staff that will be with the patient on such a transfer including hospital staff and paramedics [50265/12]

247. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for Health the number of nights between 8p.m. and 8a.m. in tabular form for each of the past 24 months that the Health Service Executive received 999 emergency ambulance calls by quantity from one to fifteen for example one night two calls, six nights four calls and so on for each month [50266/12]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 241 to 247, inclusive, together.

As these are service matters, they have been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Medical Card Applications

248. **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. [50276/12]

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.

Medical Card Reviews

249. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the reason a medical card was refused in respect of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 3. [50277/12]

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.

Medical Card Applications

250. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Offaly may expect a decision on an application for a medical card. [50294/12]

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.

Hospital Staff Recruitment

251. **Deputy John Browne** asked the Minister for Health the reason the promised podiatry post at Wexford General Hospital, sanctioned in April 2012, will now not be filled due to the Health Service Executive recruitment embargo.; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50295/12]

261. **Deputy Seamus Kirk** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the proposed podiatry post at Our Ladys Hospital, having regard to the fact that similar positions have been filled in Dublin, Galway and Limerick; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50338/12]

267. **Deputy John Halligan** asked the Minister for Health if he will give a commitment to have the podiatry post filled in Waterford Regional Hospital as it has been in hospitals in Dublin, Galway and Limerick; if he will acknowledge that the filling of this post is critical to tackling diabetes foot disease in the community and keeping persons with this health complication out of hospital, healthy and mobile; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50430/12]

269. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the promised podiatry post at Kerry General Hospital in April 2012, when it will be filled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50446/12]

273. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if he will fill the podiatry post at Mullingar Hospital, County Westmeath, as sanctioned in April 2012, the post was planned as part of the national Footcare Programme to tackle the increase in diabetes related foot ulcers and amputations, this post is critical to tackling diabetes foot disease in the community and in

keeping people with this health complication out of hospital, health and mobile; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50551/12]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 251, 261, 267, 269 and 273 together.

As these are service matters, they have been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Ulcers Incidence

252. **Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy** asked the Minister for Health in view of the upcoming world pressure ulcer day if he will supply the number of incidences of pressure ulcers in all acute hospitals for the years 2009, 2010 and 2011 [50305/12]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The detailed information sought by the Deputy is not readily available. My Department will collate the information and I will be in communication with the Deputy when the data is available.

Tobacco Control Measures

253. **Deputy John Halligan** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 49 of 24 October 2012, if any members of his Department or any Irish officials will be attending the COP5 fifth session of the Conference of the Parties to the WHO framework Convention on Tobacco Control which is due to take place in Seoul on 12 to 17 November 2012; if so, if he will provide details of this delegation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50307/12]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): Ireland played a significant role in drafting the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) Treaty which was ratified by the State in November 2005. Ireland is fully committed to its implementation and has been an active participant in the Conference of Parties to the FCTC.

Mr Chris Fitzgerald from the Health Promotion Unit of my Department is attending the fifth Conference of the Parties in Korea. Mr Norman O'Grady from the Office of the Revenue Commissioners is also in attendance.

Non-Consultant Hospital Doctors Working Conditions

254. **Deputy Derek Nolan** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 1137 if he will confirm the details of the annual leave agreement regarding holiday entitlements for non consultant hospital doctors between the Health Service Executive and the Irish Medical Organisation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50309/12]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): I welcome the agreement reached between the Health Service Executive and the Irish Medical Organisation on annual leave with the assistance of the LRC on 18 October 2012. Specifically the agreement provides that:

NCHDs who are required to undertake on-call on site or off-site in addition to their 39 hour week will receive a total leave allowance of 16 working days for the January to July rotation

and 17 working days for the July to January rotation. This means that NCHDs who are required to undertake on-call are being granted their public holiday entitlements in advance;

NCHDs who work 39 hours on a Monday to Friday basis and do not participate in on-call will receive 12 working days for the January to July rotation and 12 working days for the July to January rotation and also each of the public holidays as a paid day off on the day of the holiday. If an NCHD who is not required to undertake on-call is on annual leave for the week incorporating a public holiday, 4 days annual leave is recorded. If such NCHDs are rostered on site or on-call on a public holiday he/she will receive a day off at another time; and

GP Registrars working in the community are to have their previous entitlement of three weeks annual leave per 6 month period reinstated.

Hospital Charges

255. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Health the daily accommodation rate at the South Infirmity Hospital, County Cork; the way the cost is calculated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50315/12]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): Private in-patient charges are directed by the Minister under section 55 (1) of the Health Act 1970 (as amended.) Currently, the Minister directs the following maintenance charges under this section:

	Hospital Category	Private Accommodation	Semi-Private Accommodation	Day-care
1	HSE Regional Hospitals, Voluntary & Joint Board Teaching Hospitals	€1,046	€933	€753
2	HSE County Hospitals Voluntary Non-Teaching Hospitals	€819	€730	€586
3	HSE District Hospitals	€260	€222	€193

The private in-patient daily charge is €75, subject to a maximum payment of €750 in any period of 12 consecutive months.

The 2010 *Value for Money and Policy Review of the Economic Cost and Charges Associated with Private and Semi-Private Treatment in Public Hospitals* reviewed the current *per diem* costing methodology for calculating charges. It recommended the introduction of case-based charges using Diagnostic Related Groups for private and semi-private patients in public hospitals. The Hospital Financing Subgroup, established under the auspices of the UHI Implementation Group, is currently preparing draft policy proposals on this issue. These policy proposals must be developed in such a way as to ensure consistency with the Programme for Government commitment to introduce a 'Money Follows the Patient' funding system for public hospitals and, ultimately, the commitment to a single-tier system supported by universal health insurance.

Hospital Charges

256. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Health if patients that have paid PRSI are charged the Government in-patient levy when staying in hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50316/12]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The current statutory public in-patient charge is €75 per day, subject to a maximum of €750 in any period of 12 consecutive months. The statutory in-patient charge also applies to day cases. A number of categories of individuals are exempt from the above charge, including those with full eligibility.

The payment of PRSI contributions by an individual is not a relevant factor when determining if an individual is exempt from a charge.

Vaccination Programme

257. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Health the date on which he intends to submit the paper proposing a package of supports for those children and adolescents suffering with narcolepsy and additional medical complications following vaccination with Pandemrix which was to be submitted prior to the summer recess of Dáil Éireann and again in September and October; if the paper has been prepared; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50321/12]

258. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health when the paper will be presented to the Oireachtas regarding patients with narcolepsy after vaccinations with Pandemrix; the reason for the delay in the presentation of the paper since July 2012; when he will re-establish communication with SOUND; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50325/12]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 257 and 258 together.

My Department is working closely with the Health Service Executive (HSE) and the Department of Education and Skills to address the needs of those affected by narcolepsy following pandemic vaccination.

The HSE provides a range of services and supports to those affected including access to rapid diagnosis, clear treatment pathways, temporary medical cards and reimbursement of expenses incurred. Multi-disciplinary assessments which allow for the appropriate individualised health and educational supports to be put in place have commenced. The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) is also engaging with the HSE and with the individual schools and parents of children concerned to identify and provide educational supports for the children and adolescents affected.

My Department is considering all other possible supports which may need to be put in place for those affected. Any such supports require my approval and the consent of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform.

I would like to assure the Deputy that this matter continues to be a priority for my Department.

Question No. 258 was answered with Question No. 257.

Hospital Procedures

259. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding a hip replacement procedure at Sligo General Hospital in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Donegal [50332/12]

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

Health Services Provision

260. **Deputy Luke ‘Ming’ Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) in County Galway has no allocated funding under the health care system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50333/12]

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.

Question No. 261 was answered with Question No. 251.

Drug Treatment Programmes Funding

262. **Deputy Regina Doherty** asked the Minister for Health if there are currently supports to secure the mother and child unit in Coolmine Therapeutic Community; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50407/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): Coolmine Therapeutic Community receives funding from my Department and the HSE to provide a range of services, including a specific residential programme targeting women, many of whom are mothers. Reflecting the Government’s ongoing commitment to the National Drugs Strategy, I have approved an additional €100,000 in funding to enable the facility to provide a creche service. This will allow mothers to keep their children with them during residential treatment and remove potential barriers for women who wish to access this service.

Hospital Services

263. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide in tabular form the number of children who have accessed the paediatrics services in Letterkenny General Hospital for the years 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011 and to date in 2012; the number of children currently on the waiting list to access the paediatric services; the plans for the Health Service Executive to provide for the permanent replacement of the retired paediatric consultant at the hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50414/12]

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

Disability Diagnoses

264. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide in tabular form the number of children diagnosed as being on the autism spectrum in County Donegal aged between zero to four years, four to 12 years, 12 to 18 years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50416/12]

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.

Disability Diagnoses

265. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons in Ireland that have been diagnosed with fragile X syndrome; the number of persons currently awaiting testing for this condition; the locations at which testing is available for the condition; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50417/12]

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.

Alcohol Pricing

266. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Health when he will bring proposed legislation on alcohol pricing before Dáil Éireann; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50427/12]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The preparation of any legislation on minimum unit pricing of alcohol is preceded by Government approval and in this context, my Department is developing proposals on the basis of the recommendations in the report of the National Substance Misuse Strategy Steering Group for submission to the Government for consideration.

Question No. 267 was answered with Question No. 251.

Hospital Staff Recruitment

268. **Deputy John Halligan** asked the Minister for Health if the promised second adult diabetes endocrinologist consultant post will soon be awarded in Waterford Regional Hospital; when this post will be filled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50431/12]

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. 269 answered with Question No. 251.

Hospital Appointments Administration

270. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Health if a hospital appointment will be arranged as a matter of urgency in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Carlow.

[50527/12]

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 Appointment Status

271. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied) in County Kildare who is waiting on essential surgery in St. James's Hospital in Dublin will be prioritised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50528/12]

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

Public Sector Reform Review

272. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health the number of bodies that have been abolished or amalgamated by his Department out of the list of bodies listed in the Public Service Reform document of 17 November 2011; the savings or cost of this in 2012; the projected savings or cost of this programme in 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50541/12]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The Public Service Reform document on 17th November 2011 identified there agencies under the aegis of this Department to be rationalised, amalgamated or abolished in 2012. , The National Council for the Professional Development of Nursing and Midwifery was dissolved on the 31st December, 2011. In relation to the Opticians Board, a Working Group was established in 2010 to provide legislatively for the subsumation of the Opticians Board into the Health and Social Care Professionals Council. It is expected it will be end 2012 before the draft heads are available for Ministerial approval as part of the Health Miscellaneous Provisions Bill 2012. With regard to the National Cancer Registry Board, with the ongoing changes to the structures of the HSE, I consider that it would not at this stage be appropriate to subsume the Registry into the National Cancer Control Programme.

Progress on the candidates for critical review in the Public Health Reform document such as the Mental Health Commission and HIQA will be contingent on other factors such as the creation of a Patient Safety Authority and in the case of the National Treatment Purchase Fund and Health Insurance Authority, in the context of the move to Universal Health Insurance. I am considering the precise future role of the National Paediatric Hospital Development Board in light of the overall governance structures required for the effective running of the new children's hospital and the project to build it. With regard to PHECC, I have decided that it should continue to operate in its present form for a further period and the matter will be kept under review with a view to proceeding with the integration with CORU when it is operationally ready to assume the functions involved, which is expected to be 4 or 5 years.

The extent of savings will vary between organisations and the majority of staff will be redeployed to other public service bodies, as was the case with the National Council for the Professional Development of Nursing and Midwifery. Efficiencies will derive from economies of scale and the elimination of duplication in areas such as recruitment, procurement, payroll and ICT systems. Savings will also arise from the dissolution of Agency Boards, some of which

attract payment of travel and subsistence and/or Board fees.

Question No. 273 answered with Question No. 251.

Hospital Appointments Administration

274. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Health if he will arrange an appointment with the audiology department in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50552/12]

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

Medical Card Drugs

275. **Deputy Paudie Coffey** asked the Minister for Health if there is any scope for re-instating Glucosamine Dona as part of the medical card scheme for persons who have suffered from strokes and are not able to take anti-inflammatory as a result; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50556/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): 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. These include glucosamine, omega-3 triglyceride products, orlistat, and gluten-free products.

Glucosamine is indicated for the management of symptoms of osteoarthritis. The National Centre for Pharmoeconomics (NCPE) have 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.

Medical Card Applications

276. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding a medical card in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50564/12]

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 Staff Issues

277. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Health if he will direct the Health Service Executive to appoint a replacement doctor to the dispensary in Sneem, County Kerry even on a temporary basis of two mornings and two evenings a week in view of the fact that the discontinuation of this service in the dispensary over the past 12 months has caused much inconvenience.

nience to local residents; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50566/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Departmental Staff Promotions

278. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health the number of promotions made in his Department to principal officer higher scale, principal officer standard scale, assistant principal officer higher scale, assistant principal officer standard scale, higher executive officer scale, executive office scale and staff officer scale; the total for all of his Department; if he will provide a breakdown for for 2009, 2010, 2011 and to date in 2012; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50978/12]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The information requested by the Deputy is set out in the following table.

Grade	2012	2011	2010	2009
Principal Officer Higher	0	0	5*	2*
Principal Officer	2	0	2	0
Assistant Principal Higher	0	0	15*	0
Assistant Principal	2	2	0	0
Higher Executive Officer	2	2	0	0
Executive Officer	1	2	0	0
Staff Officer	0	0	0	0

The above figures include staff who are now staff of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs which was established in June 2011.

* All were already Assistant Principal/Principal standard scale.

Road Improvement Schemes

279. **Deputy Patrick Nulty** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide an update on the closure of Bellewstown Bridge, near Duleek, County Meath; the reason the bridge has been closed; if his attention has been drawn to the inconvenience now being experienced by the local community as a result of the closure of the bridge; if he will make funds available to repair the bridge and the cost of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50310/12]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads in its area, is a statutory function of each road authority in accordance with the provisions of section 13 of the Roads Act, 1993. Works on such roads are a matter for the relevant local authority to be funded from its own resources supplemented by State road grants.

I understand that following an inspection by Meath County Council it was decided to close this bridge for safety reasons. I also understand that Meath County Council requested the National Roads Authority (which administers regional and local road grants on behalf of the Department) to transfer funding of €92,000 within its Specific Improvement Grant Allocation for remedial works on this bridge in order for it to reopen as soon as possible and that this transfer request has been approved.

Airport Development Projects

280. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will set out the timetable for decisions in relation to the restructure of Shannon Airport to include when the Steering Group and Aviation Development Task Force will report to him and when he will respond; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50223/12]

281. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will confirm if incentives in relation to Shannon Airport will be included in or are being considered for the forthcoming budget or the forthcoming Finance Bill and if so, if he will confirm that these will not have an adverse competitive impact on Ireland West Airport Knock; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50224/12]

283. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if discussions have taken place with the EU authorities in relation to any potential incentives at Shannon Airport; the EU's response to same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50274/12]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 280, 281 and 283 together.

As the Deputy will be aware following the Government decision in principle to separate Shannon Airport from the Dublin Airport Authority and merge it in a new entity with a restructured Shannon Development, a Steering Group of senior officials from five key Departments was established to bring forward proposals for the implementation of that decision. That Steering Group is being assisted by two Task Forces.

I understand that these groups are well advanced in their work and that the Task Forces have recently submitted their Reports to the Steering Group. Both myself and Minister Bruton will revert to Government in the coming weeks with detailed proposals for Shannon.

I do not anticipate incentives specific to Shannon being part of proposals put forward. As the Deputy will be aware Budgetary matters are an issue for my colleague the Minister for Finance.

Railway Stations Upgrade

282. **Deputy Paschal Donohoe** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the National Transport Authority has decided on funding measures to improve the appearance and environment of a station (details supplied) in Dublin 7; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50271/12]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The issue raised is an operational matter for Irish Rail in conjunction with the National Transport Authority.

I have referred the Deputy's question to Irish Rail for direct reply. Please inform my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Question No. 283 answered with Question No. 280.

Public Sector Reform Review

284. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of bodies that have been abolished or amalgamated by his Department out of the list of bodies listed in the Public Service Reform document of 17 November 2011; the savings or cost of this in 2012; the projected savings or cost of this programme in 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50546/12]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I refer the Deputy to my reply to Question No. 355 of 8 November 2012. The position regarding the abolition or amalgamation of State Bodies under the remit of my Department remains the same. In relation to the savings and cost of this programme it is not possible to quantify the potential savings/cost from rationalisation until the detailed arrangements in respect of each implementation have been worked through with the agencies in question.

Traffic Management

285. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will consider examining the feasibility of introducing a left hand turn on red policy and to implement a pilot programme that would enable drivers to turn left after coming to a complete stop at an intersection where the light is red, assuming that no traffic is coming from the right (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50550/12]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): A proposal to allow for turning left on a red light in the absence of oncoming traffic was examined by my Department and the Road Safety Authority (RSA) in recent years. After careful consideration, the RSA recommended against the proposal on the grounds that it would cause confusion among motorists and pedestrians regarding the absoluteness of the red traffic light. It was also likely to lead to enforcement difficulties, relying as it does on the opinion of the driver. The overall view taken was that the safety risks outweighed any marginal gains in efficiency. While I have no firm views on the matter, I will ask the RSA to re-examine the position.

Sports Capital Programme Applications

286. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will examine an application in respect of a pre-school (details supplied) in County Kerry. [50565/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Michael Ring) : I have not received any application for funding under the 2012 Sports Capital Programme from the organisation referred to by the Deputy.

Departmental Staff Promotions

287. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of promotions made in his Department to principal officer higher scale, principal officer standard scale, assistant principal officer higher scale, assistant principal officer standard scale, higher executive officer scale, executive office scale and staff officer scale; the total for all of his Department; if he will provide a breakdown for for 2009, 2010, 2011 and to date in 2012; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [50982/12]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The total number of promotions and assignments made in my Department since 2009 to the grades listed by the Deputy is 11. In 2009, there were three promotions to Executive Officer and one to Staff Officer. In 2010, there were four promotions to Principal Officer Standard Scale and three assignees to Principal Officer Higher Scale. There have been no promotions to date in 2012.

