Written Answers.

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

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

Taxi Regulations

10. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans for taxi branding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57207/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Alan Kelly): The National Transport Authority (NTA) has responsibility for the regulation of the taxi industry under the Taxi Regulation Act, 2003, and is also the lead agency with responsibility for implementation of the recommendations of the Taxi Regulation Review Report 2011, including the implementation of the taxi "branding" as set out in that Report.

Action 31 of the Taxi Regulation Review Report in 2011 proposed the introduction of a distinctive branding on taxis and wheelchair accessible taxis by means of a semi-permanent decal to be applied to the doors on either side of the vehicle, incorporating the umbrella 'Transport for Ireland' design. The aim of the branding is to provide greater recognition of taxis, promote greater professionalism of the industry and to reduce the potential for unlicensed vehicles to operate as taxis.

The taxi door branding will be a requirement for vehicles from January 1st 2013 in order to renew a vehicle licence or change a vehicle on a licence. The details of authorised suppliers of the signage can be found on the NTA website.

Rail Services

11. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide an update on works being carried out on the Luas BXD project; the total spend on the project so far and current estimate for the cost of the completed project. [57236/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Alan Kelly): The National Transport Authority was established on 1st December 2009 and responsibility for the provision of infrastructure projects in the Greater Dublin Area, such as LUAS Broombridge, now comes under the remit of the Authority.

There has been extensive engagement between the Railway Procurement Agency, Dublin

City Council, Dublin Bus and other stakeholders over the last number of years aimed at minimising the construction impacts of Luas Broombridge on all road users, including pedestrians, and on businesses in the city centre area. A Traffic Forum has also been established, comprising representatives of the RPA, An Garda Siochana, Dublin City Council, Dublin Bus and the NTA. This forum will play the key role developing the transport arrangements that will be put in place during the construction of the Luas Broombridge. Minister Varadkar has established a high level project group, to be chaired by himself, to include RPA, NTA and Dublin City Council, Dublin Bus, An Garda Siochana, as well as representatives of traders and businesses and which will enable him to liaise directly with key stakeholders particularly in relation to traffic management issues. The inaugural meeting of this group has recently taken place.

Funding has been included in my Department's capital allocation to 2016 to cover the cost of commencing the main construction works in 2015 and for pre-construction enabling works in 2013 and 2014. Construction is expected to take 4 years. The estimated cost of the project is €368m of which approximately €16m has been spent to date.

Question No. 12 answered with Question No. 8.

Cycling Facilities

13. **Deputy Kevin Humphreys** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the funding that is being provided by the National Transport Authority for the expansion of Dublin Bikes this year and in follow on years; if he will be supporting the further expansion of the scheme; if he will be in a position to ensure this is implemented quickly; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57255/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Alan Kelly): This question is about the expansion of the Dublin Bikes scheme. Currently, I understand that the National Transport Authority is working with Dublin City Council to enable the first phase of this expansion to progress. I am informed that this phase is focussed on expanding the scheme eastwards into the Docklands and westwards to Heuston Station. Discussions are on-going at present with the operator of the current scheme in relation to this phase of expansion and I understand that it is hoped that a suitable arrangement can be concluded early next year, following which the expansion works would then be undertaken. Regarding specific funding being made available by the NTA I have referred the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Roads Maintenance

14. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the measures he will take to ensure the up keep of the State's road network to maintain safety and quality conditions in view of cutbacks in Budget 2013. [57237/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Alan Kelly): This Question concerns the maintenance and upkeep of the roads network.

The Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport has responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. Specifically, the improvement and maintenance of individual national roads is a matter for the National Roads Authority (NRA) under sections 17 and 19 of the Roads Acts 1993 (as amended) in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

The maintenance and improvement of regional and local roads is a statutory function of each road authority in accordance with the provisions of section 13 of the Roads Act 1993 (as amended). The carrying out of works on these roads is a matter for the relevant local authority to be funded from its own resources supplemented by State road grants. The initial selection and prioritisation of projects to be funded is also a matter for the local authority**.**

The NRA will be working within a very restricted budget for the next number of years. These funding constraints mean that it will not be possible to progress a range of worthwhile projects for now. Given these constraints the main priorities will be to maintain the existing road network and prioritise safety projects, followed by road improvements, and finally by new projects. In this regard, the NRA have been provided with over €647 million in 2012 for maintenance and improvement works on national roads. This figure will reduce to €319.6 million in 2013 and these monies will be mainly focused on maintenance and repairs and safety works.

This year, local authorities have been provided with over €377 million in regional and local road grants while the proposed grant in 2013 will be €346.3 million (a reduction of 8%). The priority is to maintain the road network with the main focus again being the Restoration Improvement and Maintenance programmes. Local authorities were also provided with flexibility to change their programmes if necessary to ensure resources are targeted at the areas which need it most.

Rail Services

15. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to put in place measures to increase the capacity of the Luas to deal with high volumes of passengers at the Heuston stop such as building a link between the Red Line and Green line filtering passengers off the Red Line before Heuston via Fatima stop. [57243/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Alan Kelly): The Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport has responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. Following the establishment of the National Transport Authority (NTA) in December 2009, the implementation and development of infrastructure projects in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA), such as LUAS, comes under the remit of the NTA.

Given the limited availability of Exchequer funding, Luas Broombridge is the only major public transport project to receive funding under the Government's 5-year capital investment programme for transport to 2016. This project was prioritised as it was affordable, has a strong business case and links the two existing Luas lines thereby providing a Luas network. The limited funding available to 2016 does not allow for further extensions to Luas in that period.

However capital projects such as further Luas extensions will be examined again in 2015 in advance of the next capital programme and projects which are affordable, have strong business cases and contribute to sustainable economic recovery will be shortlisted for consideration.

Tourism Promotion

16. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide details of any new projects he expects to receive funding from the €56 million provided for tourism product development between 2013 and 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57266/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Michael Ring): The Government's Medium Term Exchequer Framework 2012-2016 includes provision for significant investment in tourism product development, in recognition of the contribution that capital investment in tourism can make to increasing visitor numbers in the medium term and to sustaining economic recovery. The allocation of funding to specific tourism capital investment projects is the responsibility of Fáilte Ireland, which operates the Tourism Capital Investment Programme, and final decisions in this regard are made by the Fáilte Ireland Authority. Since the Government took office in 2011, funding of over €28 million has been approved by Fáilte Ireland under the Tourism Capital Investment Programme. Significant projects already announced include Derrynane House, Killarney House, Trinity College Book of Kells, the Dublin Heritage Mile, the Kilkenny Medieval Mile, and the first phase of the Wild Atlantic Way in Connemara, as well as a range of other investments. Much of the funding available in the period 2013-2016 will be used to meet these and other prior existing commitments.

Given the level of existing commitments, there is limited scope for additional project approvals between 2013 and 2016. Any such projects will be assessed by the Fáilte Ireland executive and by the Capital Investment Appraisal Group before being referred to the Fáilte Ireland Authority for final approval.

Departmental Funding

17. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide a detailed breakdown of the way the €7million allocated for the Gathering in the 2012 Budget will be spent; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57262/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Michael Ring): This question relates to the funding allocated to Fáilte Ireland to enable it to deliver The Gathering Ireland 2013 initiative.

A total of €7 million has been allocated from within the 2013 budget of the Department to support the Gathering. The funding will be utilised in supporting festivals and events that are being staged as part of the Gathering; engaging with communities to ensure gatherings and initiatives come to fruition successfully; international and domestic marketing of the Gathering; digital and online promotion and work to maximise the long-term legacy of the initiative and to measure its economic impact and effectiveness.

The individual amounts to be allocated to these aspects of the initiative are an operational matter for Fáilte Ireland. I have referred the matter to Fáilte Ireland for further information to be provided to the Deputy. Please contact Minister Varadkar's private office if a reply is not received within ten working days.

As the 1st January draws closer, I am confident that the Gathering will be very successful in inspiring overseas visitors to come to Ireland next year. Starting with the New Year's Eve celebrations in Dublin all the arrangements are coming together to ensure a memorable year for Irish tourism.

Departmental Budgets

18. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he is satisfied regarding the adequacy of the budget for his Department to meet in full the projected requirements in the coming year; the extent if any to which any unforeseen expenditure will be

provided for; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57194/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Alan Kelly): My Department's 2013 Budget allocations are published and available on the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform website. My Departments Vote 31 Gross allocation for 2013 is €1,658m comprising of a Capital expenditure allocation of €900m and a Current expenditure allocation of €758m.

As part of the Estimates and budgetary processes, my Department consulted with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in relation to the projected requirements for 2013 and the final allocations will meet the expected expenditure requirement. Should any unforeseen expenditure requirement arise it will be dealt with, in accordance with the public financial procedures, by way of virement or a supplementary estimate.

Question No. 19 answered with Question No. 8.

Road Safety Strategy

20. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will report on the upcoming new road strategy for 2013 to 2020; the measures that he believes should be included in the new strategy; if this will include roadside drug testing measures [57251/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Alan Kelly): The Road Safety Authority is in the process of preparing the next Road Safety Strategy, which will cover an 8-year period from 2013 to 2020. The aim of the Strategy, like all previous, will be to save lives and prevent injuries by reducing the number and severity of collisions on our roads.

The Strategy will contain key, definable actions that will seek to achieve this overall aim and to close the gap between Ireland and the best performing countries in the EU. Some of these actions will need to be underpinned by provisions in law and I expect that the Strategy will reflect measures that Minister Varadkar has recently approved for inclusion in the next Road Traffic Bill.

In general, the new Strategy, while not deflecting attention from road fatalities, will concentrate to a significant extent on serious injuries caused by road collisions.

It is the responsibility of the RSA, in the first instance, to draft the new Strategy and submit it to the Minister for consideration. I understand that consultation with all relevant stakeholders is currently taking place and it is expected that a draft will be received early in the New Year.

In relation to road side drug testing the new Road Traffic Bill, which was recently approved by Government, includes provision for road side impairment testing which will allow Gardaí to test for drugs.

Departmental Agencies Funding

21. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport in view of the fact that he plans to reduce Fáilte Ireland's budget from €63.3 million in 2013 to €53.2 million by 2015, his views on whether this will have a negative impact on the tourist industry in terms of visitor numbers and employment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57260/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Michael Ring): This question relates to the budget allocation to Fáilte Ireland.

Next year is particularly significant for Irish tourism and Minister Varadkar has allocated a special incremental €7 million from within the Department's overall budget for the Gathering Ireland 2013 initiative. This €7 million is included in Fáilte Ireland's overall current Grant-in-Aid provision of €63.3 million,although their core allocation in 2013 had been originally set at €56.4million under the Comprehensive Review of Expenditure.

Taking into account the difficult choices which the Government has had to make in regard to public expenditure, this provision reflects the recognition by the Government of the contribution that the tourism industry is making to economic recovery, employment and tax receipts and will, I believe, enable Fáilte Ireland to deliver on its remit in 2013.

There is provision in 2013 for total expenditure of just under €140 million on tourism services across a diverse range of activities. This includes a provision for the Tourism Marketing Fund of over €37m in 2013 which will enable Tourism Ireland to fully implement their 2013 Marketing Plans.

Fáilte Ireland also has an allocation of capital funding of €20 million in 2013, of which €19 million is available to support investment in tourism product and €1 million to meet Fáilte Ireland's own internal capital requirements.

As the Deputy is aware, the Government has made available a range of other supports for the tourism industry through the 2011 Jobs Initiative, not least the VAT cut to 9% which will be sustained throughout next year. In addition, the new higher cash VAT threshold of €1.25 million announced in the recent Budget should assist the cash flow of many tourism SMEs.

Tourist Accommodation

22. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the measures he will take to assist the hotel industry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57201/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Michael Ring): I refer the Deputy to my answer on this topic to Priority Question 4 of today.

Sale of Aer Lingus

23. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he or any State agency has tendered for an adviser in relation to the State's 25% shareholding in Aer Lingus; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57217/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Alan Kelly): This question concerns the Government's shareholding in Aer Lingus.

A Steering Group has been established to examine the potential options for the disposal of the State's shareholding in Aer Lingus and the issues that may need to be addressed in the context of the disposal of this shareholding. The Steering Group is chaired by my Department and comprises representatives from the Department of Finance, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and NewERA.

NewERA has provided advice to date to the relevant Government Departments, including

in relation to valuation of the Government's shareholding in Aer Lingus. In order to further assist the Inter Departmental Steering Group in considering the options with respect to the State's shareholding in Aer Lingus, I can confirm that NewERA has recently tendered for the appointment of an adviser to undertake additional analyses focused on evaluating the options for a disposal taking account of the need to maximise the return for the Exchequer whilst protecting the interests of the consumer and preserving a competitive environment.

Road Tolls

24. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the amount of money collected from road tolls to date in 2012; the amount of this money taken in by the State; if he will provide a breakdown based on the road the tolls were collected from and the companies operating them. [57245/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Alan Kelly): This Question is about outlining the income from road tolling.

The Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, has responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The implementation of individual national road schemes, including Public Private Partnership (PPP) projects which provide for tolling, are matters for the National Roads Authority (NRA) under the Roads Acts 1993-2007. Moreover, the statutory power to levy tolls on national roads, to make toll bye-laws and to enter into toll agreements with private investors in respect of national roads is very specifically vested in the NRA under Part V of the Roads Act, 1993 (as amended). The contracts for the privately-operated toll schemes are, therefore, commercial agreements between the NRA and the PPP concessionaires concerned.

Bearing in mind the circumstances I have outlined, I am not in a position to provide information in relation to tolling income from these agreements or the dispersal of that income. However, the income from tolling activity on PPP routes is published in the NRA's annual accounts in global format. This would include income from all tolled roads including the M50 and Dublin Port Tunnel. Copies of the NRA's annual accounts for the years up to 2011 are available in the Dail Library.

In order to be of assistance to the Deputy, I am refering his Question to the NRA for further reply. Please advise Minister Varadkar's private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Aviation Sector

25. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans for aviation in 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57203/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Alan Kelly): My Department's Statement of Strategy 2011-2014 outlines the over-arching goal for the aviation sector, which is to ensure that it supports Ireland's economic and social goals in a safe, competitive, cost-effective and sustainable manner and to ensure maximum connectivity for Ireland with the rest of the world.

Within this context, one of my key priorities for next year is the development of a new civil aviation policy. To launch this initiative the Irish Aviation Authority organised a successful

conference on 3 December 2012.

Building on that start both Minister Varadkar and I will, early next year, launch a six month consultation process which will include an online questionnaire to facilitate the widest possible range of inputs. This consultation process will run in parallel with Ireland's EU Presidency during which time my Department will also progress various EU aviation legislative dossiers.

We intend publishing a draft policy in quarter four next year and to seek further comments on that by end 2013. Taking account of feedback received, the overall aim is to be in a position to publish a formal policy paper by the end of March 2014. A key priority in 2013 will be to establish Shannon NewCo and restore the airport to passenger growth.

Finally, we shall continue to act as a champion for improved air access to Ireland, be it increased capacity on existing routes or the development of new routes.

Regional Airports

26. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to deliver on proposals by Ireland West Airport, Knock to create 500 new jobs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57253/12]

45. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will report on discussions with the management of Ireland West Airport, Knock County Mayo; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57252/12]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 26 and 45 together.

Plans for the development of the privately-owned regional airports, including Knock Airport, are a matter for the management of those airports. However, both I and officials of my Department have met with the Chairman and senior management of Knock airport on a number of occasions over the past six months regarding their future plans for developing the airport.

I have rationalised the system of State support for the privately-owned regional airports and the Government now has a settled policy in relation to those airports. In line with the recommendations of the Value for Money Review on the Regional Airports Programme published in 2011, funding under that Programme for the period 2012-2014 has been consolidated on four regional airports including Knock. The focus now is on airports working towards sustainability over the coming years without an on-going need for Government financial support.

In his recent Budget speech, the Minister for Finance announced that he will be putting in place measures to facilitate the construction of hangars and ancillary facilities that will be key to attracting additional aviation sector organisations and jobs to the country. These measures will be available on a national basis to all Irish airports who wish to avail of them, including Knock Airport.

With regard to existing supports for Knock Airport, it should be noted that the Airport, along with the other regional airports which are not owned by the State, has been supported over the years under the Regional Airports Programme which is aimed at ensuring balanced regional development. Under that programme, Knock Airport has received around €40m since 1993. This includes funding for the PSO air services, which although paid directly to the airlines, also supports the airport. Over €1m is being provided this year to the Airport, despite the difficult economic circumstances of the country.

In a wider context, I should point out that the development of a new civil aviation policy was initiated at a conference earlier this month and will be pursued through 2012, leading to the adoption of a new policy in 2014. In that context, I expect the role of both State and regional airports to be fully explored with submissions being made by the airports, including Knock.

Shannon Airport Facilities

27. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will clarify his statement regarding Shannon Airport when he welcomed enormous possibilities for additional military flights; the kind of military flights he was referring; his views on the use of Irish airspace by foreign military forces; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57241/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Alan Kelly): The Deputy's question relates to comments by Minister Varadkar regarding flights related to the on-going transiting of military personnel through Shannon airport. While they are often described as military flights, they are in fact civilian flights as they are civilian charter aircraft. Because they carry military personnel and equipment, the flights are subject to the provisions of the Air Navigation (Carriage of Munitions of War, Weapons and Dangerous Goods) Order 1973, as amended, which is administered by my Department.

Where opportunities are presented that would create the conditions for an expansion of such flights, the Government will in principle support such developments.

With regard to the use of Irish airspace by foreign military aircraft, this is a matter for my colleague the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, and it is governed by the provisions of the Air Navigation (Foreign Military Aircraft) Order 1952. Foreign military aircraft seeking to fly over or land in the State can only do so with the permission of the Minister for Foreign Affairs.

Search and Rescue Service

28. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide an update on his action plan to address concerns regarding maritime transport and marine emergency response; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57214/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Alan Kelly): The Deputy' question relates to the development of the action plan relating in response to Value for Money (VFM) reports on the Irish Coast Guard (IRCG) and the Marine Survey Office (MSO).

The recommendations of the two reports focus on achieving efficiencies through better utilisation of existing resources and the deployment of resources to areas they believe constitute significant gaps in service provision. The recommendations include strengthening business processes and the introduction of appropriate integrated IT systems to underpin more efficient service delivery. The need to address specific gaps in services, in particular in relation to oil pollution preparedness, prevention and response, Coast Guard volunteer training and oversight and the enduring backlogs in the transposition of international legislation, are highlighted, as is the need for more accountability based on greater transparency and better management information and the need to enhance risk assessment and mitigation in a number of respects.

My Department is finalising the action plan to respond to the VfM recommendations and it is expected that this will be completed early in the new year and will be submitted to Government then. The Department's analysis of the recommendations entails very detailed consideration of the options available for action, including obtaining additional external consultancy advice on the operation of the three Coast Guard co-ordination centres in Dublin, Malin and Valentia. It is however important to recognise that resources available to the maritime services are very limited and they have to be deployed on a prioritised basis and as effectively and efficiently as possible to address the most urgent needs.

On foot of this analysis Minister Varadkar advised the House that after careful consideration of the various options available it is his intention to propose that the three Coast Guard co-ordination centres will remain open and that none will be closed. Rather, through the utilisation of the most modern communications and IT infrastructure across a single national Coast Guard network, Minister Varadkar will be proposing that the three centres will be more closely aligned and integrated. The three centres will continue to deliver services but will be required to deliver new efficiencies in how these services are provided.

As part of the action plan Minister Varadkar will propose to address a number of related matters affecting or associated with the delivery of maritime safety and emergency response services highlighted in other reports, such as the recent review of Ireland's emergency towing services as part of the Programme for Government and audits undertaken internally, by the EU and the International Maritime Organisation.

Public Transport

29. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide an update in installing wi-fi on public transport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57211/12]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport.

In the Greater Dublin Area (GDA), funding for the implementation and development of public transport infrastructure projects, such as the installation of wi-fi on both buses and trains, is provided by my Department to the National Transport Authority (NTA) for allocation to projects and programmes. Noting this I have referred the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply in relation to the installation of wi-fi on buses and trains in the GDA.

Outside of the GDA, my Department provides funding directly to Irish Rail for the implementation and development of public transport infrastructure projects, such as the installation of wi-fi on services operated by Irish Rail. I understand that the WIFI programme on the Irish Rail passenger fleet will be completed by year end.

Nevertheless I have also referred the Deputy's question to Irish Rail for direct reply to provide the full details specifically in relation to the installation of wi-fi on trains outside of the GDA.

Please advise my private office if you don't receive both replies within 10 working days.

Taxi Regulations

30. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the rationale for the continuation of the sitting of the SPSV licence entry test in view of the oversupply of SPSV drivers on the road currently. [57240/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Alan Kelly): As part of the Taxi Regulation Review 2011, the examination of the broad issues for future regulatory policy was assisted by an economic analysis of the taxi market carried out by the consultants, Indecon. The analysis found that a fall in demand for SPSV services over a 3-4 year period had not been matched by a corresponding level of exit from the industry, leading to a clear problem of oversupply. The Indecon analysis suggests that the impact of non-compliant operators and low levels of exit from the industry are significant impacting factors on oversupply.

The future approach of the Review Group recommended in the Review Report is towards improvements in the regulation of qualitative standards in the industry and to encourage exit from the industry of those who operate in breach of the required standards and regulations, through better enforcement. Ensuring standards in the taxi industry commences at the point of entry on application for an SPSV licence.

The skills development test for the SPSV drivers licence was introduced in 2009 and then extended to all licensed drivers by 2012. The purpose of the test is to ensure that the recipient of an SPSV driver licence has a sufficient level of knowledge of their area of operation, and of the regulations governing the industry, to provide the appropriate standard of service to passengers. The test is quite onerous with a low pass rate. Discontinuation of the test would not be an appropriate or proportionate response to the issue of oversupply in the industry and would not solve any of the immediate problems the taxi sector faces.

Sports Capital Programme

31. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide details of the sports capital grant in terms of the total amount in new funding; the amount allocated thus far; the amount of funding still to be allocated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57259/12]

46. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport in view of the fact that €12.5 million has been allocated for capital spending on sport for 2013 and that this represents a fall of €5.5 million 30% on the 2012 allocation, if he will provide details of the national and regional projects he intends to fund in 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57264/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Michael Ring): I propose to take Questions Nos. 31 and 46 together.

€30m is available to me to allocate to successful applicants under the 2012 round of the Sports Capital Programme. I recently announced almost €26m in provisional allocations for local projects under the 2012 SCP and will shortly be announcing a further €4m in provisional allocations in respect of non-local projects.

Question No. 32 answered with Question No. 7.

Departmental Budgets

33. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide in tabular form, a detailed breakdown of his Department's funding for sports in Budget 2012; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57256/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Michael Ring): The funding allocated to each of the sport subheads in my Department's vote for 2013 is as outlined in the table.

2013 Allocation

Subhead	Subhead	Capital	Current
-	-	€m	€m
D3	Grants for Sporting Bodies (Sports Capital Programme)	12.5	-
D4	Grants for provision and renovation of Swimming Pools	5.6	-
D5	Irish Sports Council	-	43.153
D6	National Sports Campus	4.8	1.498

Proposed Legislation

34. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when the proposed new Road Traffic Bill will be published; the main new measures comprised in the Bill including any proposed new penalty point offences, including reduced thresholds for learner drivers, N-plates for new drivers for a period of two years and the non-display of L-plates; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57250/12]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Government approved the General Scheme of the new Road Traffic Bill for formal drafting on 11 December 2012. The next step is for the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel to examine the General Scheme in consultation with my officials, with a view to producing a formal draft of the Bill. The General Scheme has been published on my Department's website. It is in the nature of such examination and drafting that it is not possible to predict in advance how long this process may take.

The Bill will address a range of issues. These include creating a new category of Novice Drivers who will have to display an 'N' plate, and reducing the threshold for automatic six months disqualification for learners and novices from twelve penalty points to six. Provision will also be made to provide for evidential non-technical impairment tests (e.g. walking a straight line) that may be used in court, and there will be a new procedure to allow for the taking of a blood sample, subject to medical approval, from an unconscious driver following a serious road traffic collision.

I am also including measures arising out of the penalty points review conducted earlier this year. This involves adjustments to the penalty points applying for a number of offences. Penalty points will also apply in future for learners and novices for non-display of 'L' or 'N' plates.

The Bill will also include a number of minor and technical amendments.

Public Transport Provision

35. **Deputy Kevin Humphreys** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has considered expanding the Leap card to allow it to be used for the Dublin bikes schemes; if he will bring this proposal to the National Transport Authority and Dublin City Council; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57254/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Alan Kelly): Responsibility to develop, procure, implement, operate and maintain the integrated ticketing Leap Card system in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA) became a function of the National Transport Authority (NTA) with effect from 30th September 2010.

I understand from the NTA, however, that they have had initial discussions with the Dublin Bikes scheme and are currently reviewing the options for integration with the Leap card scheme. Both schemes use contactless RFID technology (Radio Frequency Identification) so there are technical options which can be explored which will need to be discussed and agreed alongside commercial considerations.

Sports Capital Programme Applications

36. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if any additional funding will be made available to support some of the clubs which were not allocated money under the 2012 sports capital programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57138/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Michael Ring): There are no plans to allocate Sports Capital Programme funding to clubs who were unsuccessful under the 2012 Sports Capital Programme, though of course it will be open to such clubs to apply under the next round of the programme.

EU Funding

37. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will outline his involvement in developing the transport element of the connecting Europe facility; if he will state the specific projects that he is likely to fund through the various financial instruments available under the facility; if it is the his preference to fund road infrastructure from the fund; if so, the proportion of funds available to Ireland that are intended to go to road infrastructure; if he will state his priorities for the forthcoming EU Council presidency in relation to EU transportation development; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57190/12]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) was published by the Commission on 19 October 2011. The CEF forms part of the Multi Annual Financial Framework for 2014 to 2020 and the proposed Regulation sets out how €50bn funding will be used to invest in transport, energy and telecoms infrastructures and networks over that time period. The Annex to the Regulation sets out ten so-called "core transport corridors" across the EU.

In Ireland's case, elements of our transport network form part of one of these corridors. Inclusion here, however, is no guarantee of funding from the EU or any other source. It is simply a means of identifying the key "bottlenecks" and "missing links" on the main strategic transport routes across Europe. The emphasis in the CEF and associated Transport Guidelines Regulation (the TEN T) is on a modal shift from road to rail and rail freight in particular. Notwithstanding this, Transport Ministers agreed a General Approach on the Commission proposal on 7

June last that allowed for some limited provision for investment in road infrastructure in Member States - like ours - which are isolated from the main rail network of the EU.

The final outcome of negotiations with the European Parliment and Council on CEF is dependent on the outcome of the Multi Annual Financial Framework negotiations. Both CEF and TENT are key priorities for our Presidency. Other priorities include the Airports Package and the 4th Railway Package.

Road Improvement Schemes

38. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding the upgrading of the N22 Ballyvourney to Ovens Road, County Cork; if he envisages that this road will be constructed in the foreseeable future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57248/12]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects is a matter for the National Roads Authority (NRA) under the Roads Acts 1993 to 2007 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Generally, in relation to the capital funding of the national road network, it must be emphasised that progress on individual road schemes, including any improvement works on this route, will very much depend on the availability of funds within a reduced budget. The Government's published Capital Expenditure Review confirms that new major road construction projects will be scaled down significantly in the period to 2016. In 2013 no new, fully Exchequer funded, roads projects are planned to commence construction. However, it is hoped that funding will be secured for a small number of PPP projects as part of the first phase of the Infrastructure Stimulus announced by Minister Howlin in July of this year. Consideration is being given to the possibility of this project being advanced as a PPP project as part of the second phase of the Infrastructure Stimulus.

Notwithstanding the above, I have referred the Deputy's question to the NRA for direct reply in relation to this route. Please advise my private office if you don't receive a reply within 10 working days.

State Agencies

39. **Deputy Michael Colreavy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide a detailed account of the plans to merge Shannon Development's functions with Fáilte Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57261/12]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Government decided in May 2012 to restructure Shannon Development and to transfer its enterprise support functions to Enterprise Ireland and the IDA, and its tourism functions to Fáilte Ireland. The transitional arrangements associated with these moves were examined over the following months as part of the work of a Change Management Task Force.

This decision was confirmed by Government on 27th November as part of the broader decision to grant Shannon Airport full independence from the Dublin Airport Authority and merge the airport with a restructured Shannon Development to form a new, publicly-owned, commer-

cial entity in 2013.

It is envisaged that the tourism functions of Shannon Development, together with the associated staff, will transfer to Fáilte Ireland in the first few months of 2013. Provison will be made in my Department's 2013 allocation to Fáilte Ireland for the associated pay and programme costs. In advance of this, both agencies are collaborating in the preparation of 2013 Operational Plans for the Mid-West region and ensuring continuity in the provision of services to tourism businesses. As part of this process they are in regular consultation with tourism industry in the region.

Taxi Ranks

40. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the work he is doing to ensure the best integration of taxis into the Dublin transport network in advance of the development of the LUAS BXD project, including ensuring sufficient ranks are provided especially during construction stages. [57242/12]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Following the establishment of the National Transport Authority (NTA) on 1st December 2009, the provision of infrastructure projects in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA), such as Luas Broombridge, now comes under the remit of the NTA.

The construction of the Luas Broombridge project (also referred to as the Luas BXD Project) was approved by An Bord Pleanála in August of this year and advance works will commence next year.

Every effort has been made to minimise the construction impacts of Luas BXD on all road users, including pedestrians, and on businesses in the city centre area. A Traffic Forum has been established for the project, comprising representatives of the RPA, An Garda Síochána, Dublin City Council, Dublin Bus and the NTA. This forum will play the key role developing the transport arrangements that will be put in place during the construction of the Luas Broombridge.

I understand from the NTA that as part of that project certain taxi ranks will require relocation along the path of the scheme, some on a temporary basis and others on a permanent basis. The Environmental Impact Study (EIS) for Luas Broombridge indicated which Taxi Rank spaces were affected (temporarily & permanently) by the project and identified possible replacement locations. A review is currently being carried out by the NTA to provide additional taxi rank spaces that also incorporates the replacement spaces considered in the EIS.

Tourism Promotion

41. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the way he plans to reduce the tourism marketing fund by 5%; where he expects the savings to come from; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57265/12]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The question relates to the allocation for the Tourism Marketing Fund in 2013.

The overall provision for tourism services in 2013 is approximately €140 million across a diverse range of activities. Within this, the Tourism Marketing Fund has a provision of over €37 million. While this represents a reduction of 5% on the 2012 allocation, it will enable Tourism Ireland to fully implement their 2013 Marketing Plans which were launched by Minister Varad-

kar on the 29th November. Most of the Tourism Marketing fund is allocated to Tourism Ireland, the agency with responsibility for the overseas promotion of Ireland as a tourist destination. As the Deputy will be aware, all north/south bodies are required to achieve 3% efficiency savings year on year, with the balance of the reduction in 2013 being implemented through a consolidation in the areas of overseas product, niche and regional marketing led by Fáilte Ireland.

While the Tourism Marketing Fund itself has been reduced slightly, it should be noted that the major focus of overseas promotion next year will be on The Gathering Ireland 2013, the biggest ever tourism initiative held in Ireland. A special allocation of €7 million has been provided for the initiative in the Estimates for 2013 which should assist in achieving our ambitious target of 325,000 extra visitors to Ireland next year.

State Agencies

42. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which he expects the various bodies under his aegis to be in a position to make a sizeable or important contribution towards economic recovery in the coming year; if he has identified particular areas in the tourism, transport or sporting sectors that are likely to present specific opportunities in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57195/12]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Programme for Government sets out the measures which the Government are taking to achieve economic recovery. The Programme places a heavy emphasis on tourism as one of the key areas for the generation of employment and also on the delivery of effective transport services. The Action Plan for Jobs 2012 is designed to have 100,000 more people in work by 2016 and 2 million people in work by 2020. The net 100,000 jobs over the next five years to 2016 will be created through direct jobs in manufacturing (20,000) and internationally traded services (30,000) plus an additional 50,000 indirect spin-off jobs.

I announced my priorities for 2012 and also my medium and longer term priorities on my Department's website. Early in the new year, I will both be reporting on the achievement of the 2012 priorities and setting out my priorities for 2013. The Statement of Strategy which is also publically available on the website sets out the specific measures that my Department will be taking in the period to 2014. A key commitment of that Strategy is to increase tourism numbers to 8 million by 2015. The Trade, Tourism and Investment Strategy of 2010 envisaged that this would result in an additional 15,000 directly employed in tourism.

Transport demand, on the other hand, is primarily derived from the outputs of other economic sectors. One would expect increases in demand and employment within the transport sector to result from increased economic outputs generally.

Taxi Regulations

43. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will consider further financial incentives to increase the number of wheelchair accessible vehicles in the State's taxi fleet. [57238/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Alan Kelly): The National Transport Authority (NTA) has responsibility for the regulation of the taxi industry under the Taxi Regulation Act, 2003 . Among the principal functions of the NTA, as provided for under Section 9 of that Act, is the promotion of access to small public service

vehicles by persons with disabilities.

It is a matter for the NTA to decide on the future approach to incentives for wheelchair accessible taxis in the light of the available funding and other priorities as regards supporting enhanced accessibility of public transport services generally, including bus, rail and taxi services.

While there has been a relatively low take-up of the previous grant schemes towards increasing the number of wheelchair accessible taxis, I understand that the NTA will be reviewing this issue in early 2013. I would also point out to the Deputy that as part of the taxi review undertaken last year, it was decided to review the standards that are set for Wheelchair Accessible Taxis so that the cost of such a vehicle can be reduced. Similarly work is progressing on a single dispatcher for accessible services and will be piloted as part of this review by the NTA.

Sports Capital Programme Applications

44. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the criteria used to determine the way the €26 million of funding for sports capital grants was allocated to sports clubs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57137/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Michael Ring): All applications received under the 2012 Sports Capital Programme were first checked to ensure eligibility and then eligible applications were initially assessed against the following criteria (the final 4 criteria only apply to regional and national projects):

Selection Criteria
Increase in the levels of active participation/ improved standards of sporting performance, especially among women and older citizens
Level of socio-economic disadvantage in the area
Technical merits of the project
Financial viability of project
Level of own funding available
Extent to which applicant will be able to maintain project after completion
Current and planned levels of sport and/or recreational sport facilities in the area
Current or proposed sharing of facilities with other sporting groups or schools
Level of SCP (or other Government) funding received in the past
Strategies to be used to attract people from disadvantaged areas
Priority of proposed improvements/ facility in relation to existing facilities
Priorities as identified by the NGB (national/regional projects only)
Priority as identified by the Irish Sports Council (NGB and third level only)
Location of facility within the network of national, regional and municipal facilities (non-local projects only)
Linkages with Local Authorities Swimming Pools Programme (municipal multi-sport only)

In deciding the final allocations of funding to local projects within each county I had regard to a number of additional factors, including:

- the performance of each application during the assessment process;

- ensuring a geographic spread of projects within each county;

- ensuring an appropriate spread of projects between rural and urban areas within each county; and

- ensuring that there is a spread of projects among different sports.

Question No. 45 answered with Question No. 26.

Question No. 46 answered with Question No. 31.

Overseas Development Aid Provision

47. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his plans to set out interim targets in relation to funding levels for overseas development aid to achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57462/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Joe Costello): The Government is strongly committed to Ireland's aid programme. The programme prioritises the fight against global poverty and hunger and is consistently rated internationally as one of the most effective in the world. It is strongly focused on the poorest countries and communities in sub-Saharan Africa, prioritising investments in the areas of education, health, good governance, food security and nutrition.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) - the framework for international development policy up to 2015 - are central to Ireland's overseas development programme, and to the Government's development policy. Globally, the incidence of poverty is reducing, and it is likely that the first Millennium Development Goal – to halve world poverty by 2015 – will be met. International aid has played a hugely important part in contributing to this progress.

For 2012, the Government provided some €639 million in total Official Development Assistance (ODA). In 2013, it is anticipated that ODA will amount to €623 million, a modest reduction on the 2012 level. Stabilising the ODA budget has been an important and very significant achievement for this Government, particularly in light of the extraordinarily difficult economic conditions facing the country. Progress towards achieving the UN target of 0.7% of GNP for development assistance can only be made through restoring sustainable growth in our economy.

Undocumented Irish in the USA

48. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has considered a proposal (details supplied) in relation to visas for highly skilled jobs and the undocumented Irish in the US; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57480/12]

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 will continue to be pursued by the Government in our ongoing contacts with the US Administration and Congress. 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 is likely to be the only manner by which such a resolution can be achieved. The prospects for such reform would appear to have advanced in the wake of President Obama's re-election. Through our Embassy in Washington and in close liaison with Irish-American community representatives, our contacts with the US Administration and Congress will intensify over the coming weeks 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. In this regard, I raised the issue with Secretary of State Hillary Clinton during our bilateral meeting on 6 December last and recalled our strong support for comprehensive immigration legislation and the passage of E3 visas for Irish citizens. It is likely that any E3 visa arrangement would encompass an element of reciprocity for US citizens wishing to work in Ireland.

Much further debate and discussion is likely to be required within the US political system as to what any future legislative 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 the area will continue to receive the Government's close attention over the period ahead.

Northern Ireland Issues

49. **Deputy Joe Higgins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will follow up the case of a person (details supplied) with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in view of the reported cases of repeated police harassment they have been subjected to and their current incarceration on contested grounds. [57523/12]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): The question refers to a matter that is before the courts concerning the possible illegal activities of a private individual. Respecting the integrity and strength of the judicial process in Northern Ireland, I do not consider it appropriate to make any public statements that would undermine that process. However, while no institution is above criticism, it is important to recall that the completion of the devolution of policing and justice marked an important milestone in fulfilling the vision of the Good Friday Agreement and in the transformation of policing structures in Northern Ireland. All those involved in changing attitudes around policing can be very proud of the service they have built and the changed culture of policing.

More than a decade on from the Patten Report, authority and responsibility for policing and justice issues are now where they ought to be – at the local level, accountable to, and operating for the benefit of all in the community. In the spirit of Patten, the PSNI is a police service, not a police *force* , part of the framework of society in the north.

Anti-Social Driving Practices

50. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade further to Parliamentary Question No. 1 of 17 October 2012, if contact has been made with the Justice Minister in the Northern Ireland Executive or with other Departments or agencies on a cross-Border basis to deal with serious anti-social driving practices on the N54-A3 road; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57527/12]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): As the Deputy is aware from my answers to previous questions on this matter, the issue of anti-social driving practices on the N54/A3 road is not a matter for the North South Ministerial Council. However, I did take the opportunity at the NSMC Plenary meeting in Armagh on 2 November,

to bring the issue to the attention of my colleagues from the Northern Ireland Executive. The seriousness of the issue of anti-social driving behaviour is recognised by Ministers on both sides of the border. The matter has been brought to the attention of the Department of Justice and Equality for appropriate action.

Irish Language Issues

51. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the discussions he has had with Members of the Northern Ireland Executive in relation to the Irish Language Act; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57552/12]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): All parties to the Good Friday Agreement recognised the importance of respect, understanding and tolerance in relation to linguistic diversity, including in Northern Ireland, the Irish language and the languages of the various ethnic communities, as part of the cultural wealth of the island of Ireland. In the St Andrews Agreement, the British government committed to introducing an Irish Language Act reflecting on the experience of Wales and Ireland and to working with the Executive to enhance and protect the development of the Irish Language.

It also called on the incoming Northern Ireland Executive to work to enhance and protect the development of the Irish language. The British legislation giving effect to the St. Andrews Agreement included a specific requirement on the Executive to adopt a strategy setting out how it proposed to enhance and protect the development of the Irish language.

Since the restoration of the devolved Institutions on 8 May 2007, the question of an Irish Language Act for Northern Ireland is a devolved matter and is the responsibility of the Northern Ireland Executive. In that regard, my colleagues the Minister for Arts, Heritage & the Gaeltacht, Mr Jimmy Deenihan T.D. and Minister of State Dinny McGinley T.D. have had ongoing discussions on the matter with his counterpart, the Northern Ireland Minister for Culture, Arts and Leisure, Ms Carál Ní Chuilín MLA. On 11 July 2012, Minister Ní Chuilín launched a consultation process which concluded on 27 November on strategies for the Irish language and Ulster Scots.

I recently visited An Chultúrlann in Belfast which is a very impressive Irish language and cultural centre. I had the opportunity to meet with some of the city's leading Irish language activists and to hear their concerns regarding the promotion of the Irish language including their views on an Irish language act for Northern Ireland.

The Government continues to follow developments closely in relation to the proposed Act, as well as the overall enhancement and protection of the Irish Language in Northern Ireland. We remain fully committed to the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement and the St Andrews Agreement, including the provisions relating to the Irish language.

EU Presidency Expenditure

52. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his priorities for the EU presidency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57598/12]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): The Irish Presidency of the Council of the European Union will focus on three core priorities: stability, and creating the conditions for sustainable jobs and growth. These priorities will drive work

across all Council formations. Restoring stability and confidence through effective economic governance for Europe is necessary for creating the conditions necessary for employment and growth. The Presidency will work to restore stability by managing the implementation of the EU's economic governance measures, and in particular the European Semester process, the new system of economic and budgetary policy coordination between Member States.

During our Presidency, Ireland will support the EU's efforts to address the weaknesses in our Economic and Monetary Union exposed by the financial crisis. Much has already been achieved and we will build on the foundations laid by successive European Councils, in particular through working to advance proposals on Banking Union.

In preparing for the Presidency, the Government has identified in every sector proposals that they believe can best deliver stability, jobs and growth. These cover a wide area. There are measures to combat unemployment, particularly among our young people, through providing new skills and training and making it easier to work in other countries. There are a series of proposals to free up and develop the Single Market, from which Ireland as an export-led economy has benefitted so much. We will seek agreement on a new framework for research and innovation and progress on a number of proposals for boosting the digital economy, covering the areas of intellectual property, cyber security, e-signatures, data protection and high-speed broadband rollout. This work will be vital for creating the right environment for the jobs of the future.

Ireland will also make the case for improving Europe's global trade relations, particularly with the United States, opening up markets across the world. Small and medium Enterprises are the backbone of the European economy and of the Irish economy; we will seek agreement on a programme to improve the competitiveness of the sector. We will also insist that the policies adopted by the European Union, whether in the field of agriculture, energy or the environment, are sustainable in the long-term.

Work on preparing for the Presidency is in the final stages and we will launch our detailed programme for the Presidency in early January. We take on the Presidency at a time of crisis and change but we are looking forward to making our contribution to resolving Europe's difficulties and to meeting the needs of citizens in Ireland and across the European Union.

Humanitarian Aid

53. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the degree to which the international community has been in a position to support aid and relief agencies in Syria, with particular reference to Médecins sans Frontières; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57651/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Joe Costello): The humanitarian crisis in Syria is of great concern to the Government. Since the uprising in Syria began in March 2011 an estimated 40,000 people have been killed in the violence. Over 2.5 million people inside Syria are in need of immediate humanitarian assistance, with 1.2 million people displaced inside the country. The number of registered refugees from Syria in the region has now passed half a million. Syrians' access to the most basic medical care has been seriously undermined. Stocks of essential drugs are low, storage facilities for medicines have been destroyed and local production of medicines has been severely disrupted. Health workers find themselves increasingly under threat and medical facilities have been indiscriminately targeted.

Ireland has responded swiftly to the humanitarian crisis in Syria and in neighbouring countries. As early as March 2012 we provided €500,000 in emergency funding for the ICRC, UNHCR and the World Food Programme. In August I visited Jordan and witnessed firsthand the huge strain that the refugee population is placing on the host countries and partners underlined to me the critical health needs within Syria itself. Since then Ireland has provided additional support of €1,950,000 which brings Ireland's total response to the crisis to €2,450,000. Part of this funding supported WHO (€300,000) and ICRC (€400,000) to respond specifically to the medical needs of Syria's population, focusing on increasing the number of mobile health clinics and expanding their outreach to areas most affected by the conflict. A key partner of Irish Aid, Medecins Sans Frontières (MSF) is providing emergency health care in Syria. MSF has a policy in place which does not allow them to accept Governmental support for their activities in Syria. However, we are in regular contact with them regarding the health crisis in the country and the needs on the ground.

Ireland understands that while this is a humanitarian crisis, it is driven by politics and will only be solved with a political solution. We continue to strongly support the efforts of the UN/Arab League Joint Special Representative, Lakhdar Brahimi, to promote a political settlement. An Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Eamon Gilmore, T.D was very pleased to meet with Mr. Brahimi during the recent OSCE Ministerial Meeting in Dublin where he also met with Secretary of State Clinton and Foreign Minister Lavrov. Ireland has also participated actively within the framework of the Friends of Syria Group, which includes my own attendance at the most recent meeting of the group last week in Marrakesh.

Ireland has provided significant support to those in need as a result of this crisis. Into the future we will continue to monitor the situation so that we can assess when we may be able to further contribute, within our means, to the humanitarian needs within the region.

Property Taxation Exemptions

54. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Finance if persons acting in the capacity of executors of wills will be included in the list of persons allowed to defer payment of the property tax, save where the executor of the will, or the spouse or partner are the sole or joint beneficiary of the property concerned; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57511/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Under section 11 of the Finance (Local Property Tax) Bill, the personal representative of the estate of a person who was a liable person for Local Property Tax will be the liable person in relation to a relevant residential property. The reason for making a personal representative a liable person is to prevent the avoidance of the payment of local property tax by means of unnecessarily delaying the distribution of the estate and the transfer of a property to the person who would become the liable person in respect of the property. This might happen, for example, where the person who inherits the property is already living in the property and there are no other beneficiaries involved. The tax will be part of the expenses of the estate, along with other regular expenses, including other taxes, where applicable.

However, I appreciate that it might not always be possible for the personal representatives to fund the payment of local property tax, whether the tax was owed by the deceased person or by the personal representatives in respect of the period following death. Addressing this difficulty is not straightforward given the variety of complex circumstances that can pertain to the administration of an estate. As I indicated on Committee Stage of the Finance (Local Property Tax) Bill in the Dáil on 18 December last, I intend re-visit the provisions regarding executors, in the context of Finance Bill

Property Taxation Application

55. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide the underlying calculations in support of the estimated yield from the proposed property tax of €250 million in 2013, such workings to set out the assumed range of property values and associated volume of properties, non-compliance rates, deferral volume and value. [57387/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): In order to estimate a potential yield from a property tax based on value bands, an estimate of the share of properties that fall within each band is needed. As a data set of the values of all of Ireland's property does not exist, a methodology for estimation must be formulated. In order to build conservatism into the yield forecast from the new local property tax, no single methodology was exclusively used for estimating a distribution of property values. Instead the yield was based on a blend of three approaches.

The first approach was based on the data used in the Thornhill Report updated to include regional variation in property prices. At the time of the Thornhill report a national register of prices of property transactions did not exist. As an alternative, the Central Statistics Office (CSO) provided the number of properties sold across a range of value bands of €50,000 increments for each of the years 2005 to 2009. The data was based on mortgage transactions and is an input into the CSO's residential property price index (RPPI). Using the national change in values in the CSO RPPI from the year of the transaction to April 2012, a national distribution of property values in 2012 prices was constructed. This is the distribution published in the Thornhill Report (see Table 1 below). Regional variation was added to the Thornhill distribution using county level housing stock from census 2011 data (see Table 2), and regional variation in prices from the CSO RPPI. Three property price distributions were constructed; Dublin, national, and national excluding Dublin. This compares with one distribution in the Thornhill Report.

A weighted average property charge for each of the three regional distributions was constructed, weighted by the share of properties in each band. A county level yield was then calculated based on the number of properties in each county according to data from Census 2011 and the estimated weighted average charge. By summing over all counties a national yield was estimated. This approach results in a larger indicative yield than does the Thornhill approach due to a higher weighting of higher value properties in counties with larger volumes of properties (e.g. Dublin).

Counties were assigned one of the three constructed distributions. The four Dublin local authority areas were assumed to have a distribution in line with the Dublin price distribution, counties with large urban areas and counties adjacent to Dublin were assumed a have a price distribution in line with the national distribution and the remaining counties were assumed to be in line with the national distribution that excludes Dublin (see Table 3).

A weighted average property charge for each of the three regional distributions was constructed, weighted by the share of properties in each band. A county level yield was then calculated based on the number of properties in each county according to data from Census 2011 and the estimated weighted average charge. By summing over all counties a national yield was estimated. This approach results in a larger indicative yield to the Thornhill approach due to a higher weighting of higher value properties in counties with larger volumes of properties (e.g. Dublin).

The second approach used was similar but was based on data from the property price register. In autumn 2012, the Property Services Regulatory Authority published a national register

of property prices (www.propertypriceregister.ie). The register includes the date of sale, price and address of all residential properties purchased in Ireland since 1 January 2010, as declared to the Revenue Commissioners for Stamp Duty purposes. The register is updated on an on-going basis. Data from the register were used to produce county level distributions as well as distributions in line with the three regional price indices published by the CSO, namely Dublin, national, and national excluding Dublin. These distributions are set out in Table 4.

The distribution from the register results in a higher incidence of higher value properties and a less peaked distribution to that in the Thornhill Report at values around €100,000 to €200,000 and an analysis based entirely on the register would result in a higher yield compared with the first approach described above. However, caution should be applied to solely relying on the register given the low number of transactions, the high percentage of non-mortgage (i.e. cash transactions) and the possible bias in recent transactions towards transactions of higher quality housing stock which may not represent the generality of housing valuations in the State.

The final method of estimation is based on the ESRI tax-benefit model SWITCH. In the SWITCH model, data on house prices come from the self-assessed value provided by the respondents to the Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) in 2010 with these values indexed to adjust to 2012 prices. The SILC data are based on a sample of all private households, giving it the potential to provide a broader picture than one based on transactions or mortgages.

For each of the approaches described above an assumed deferral rate of 16% was applied. This is based on work by the Economic and Social Research Institute on behalf of the Thornhill Group.

Table 1: Thornhill Report and Property Price Register Distribution

Bands	Thornhill Report	Property Price Register
0-100000	7.20%	27.40%
100001-150000	33.70%	21.00%
150001-200000	32.00%	19.20%
200001-250000	14.90%	11.20%
250001-300000	6.21%	6.70%
300001-350000	2.72%	4.40%
350001-400000	1.37%	2.60%
400001-450000	0.72%	1.70%
450001-500000	0.39%	1.30%
500001-550000	0.23%	1.00%
550001-600000	0.12%	0.60%
600001-650000	0.10%	0.50%
650001-700000	0.07%	0.40%
700001-750000	0.03%	0.30%
750001-800000	0.03%	0.20%
800001-850000	0.03%	0.20%
850001-900000	0.02%	0.20%
900001-950000	0.03%	0.10%
950001-1000000	0.01%	0.10%
>1000000	<1%	1.00%
Total	100%	100%

Table 2: Number of households

Bands	Number of Households
Carlow	19,436
Cavan	25,818
Clare	42,648
Cork CoCo	140,856
Cork City	47,163
Cork Total	188,019
Donegal	57,964
Dublin City	208,008
Fingal	93,146
D-L Rathdown	75,819
South Dublin	90,019
Dublin Total	466,992
Galway CoCo	60,952
Galway City	27,726
Galway Total	88,678
Kerry	53,306
Kildare	70,763
Kilkenny	33,679
Laois	28,020
Leitrim	12,308
Limerick Co Co	47,282
Limerick City	22,367
Limerick Total	69,649
Longford	14,453
Louth	43,972
Mayo	48,070
Meath	62,201
Monaghan	21,264
Offaly	26,750
Roscommon	23,672
Sligo	24,525
North Tipperary	25,703
South Tipperary	32,794
Waterford Co Co	24,114
Waterford City	18,221
Westmeath	30,739
Wexford	52,652
Wicklow	47,798

Table 3: Thornhill Distribution with regional variation

Bands	National	Dublin	National excl Dublin
0-100000	10.20%	3.04%	8.87%

Bands	National	Dublin	National excl Dublin
100001-150000	34.02%	26.26%	36.55%
150001-200000	29.55%	35.42%	30.90%
200001-250000	14.27%	16.64%	13.90%
250001-300000	5.70%	7.93%	5.52%
300001-350000	2.74%	3.86%	2.28%
350001-400000	1.40%	2.35%	1.04%
400001-450000	0.75%	1.44%	0.51%
450001-500000	0.46%	0.69%	0.23%
500001-550000	0.26%	0.30%	0.12%
550001-600000	0.09%	0.05%	0.05%
600001-650000	0.05%	0.67%	0.02%
650001-700000	0.00%	0.52%	0.01%
700001-750000	0.08%	0.08%	0.00%
750001-800000	0.17%	0.46%	0.00%
800001-850000	0.05%	0.20%	0.00%
850001-900000	0.11%	0.06%	0.00%
900001-950000	0.07%	0.04%	0.00%
950001-1000000	0.01%	0.00%	0.01%
>1000000	0.04%	0.04%	0.04%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Table 4: Property Price Register Distribution

Bands	National	Dublin	National excl Dublin
0-100000	27.40%	8.50%	37.60%
100001-150000	21.00%	15.90%	23.70%
150001-200000	19.20%	22.30%	17.50%
200001-250000	11.20%	14.50%	9.40%
250001-300000	6.70%	9.60%	5.20%
300001-350000	4.40%	7.40%	2.70%
350001-400000	2.60%	4.90%	1.40%
400001-450000	1.70%	3.30%	0.80%
450001-500000	1.30%	2.90%	0.40%
500001-550000	1.00%	2.20%	0.30%
550001-600000	0.60%	1.50%	0.20%
600001-650000	0.50%	1.10%	0.10%
650001-700000	0.40%	0.90%	0.10%
700001-750000	0.30%	0.80%	0.10%
750001-800000	0.20%	0.50%	0.10%
800001-850000	0.20%	0.50%	0.00%
850001-900000	0.20%	0.30%	0.10%
900001-950000	0.10%	0.30%	0.00%
950001-1000000	0.10%	0.20%	0.00%
>=1000000	1.00%	2.30%	0.20%

Bands	National	Dublin	National excl Dublin
Total	100%	100%	100%

Property Taxation Collection

56. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide an estimate of the cost of administering and collecting the proposed new property tax and household charge arrears in 2013; if he will provide an estimate of administering and collecting the household charge in 2012; and if he will indicate in the budget 2013 documentation where account has been taken of any increased cost. [57388/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Revenue Commissioners will be resourced to ensure the successful implementation of the Local Property Tax. The additional resources required for 2013 are noted in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform Expenditure Report 2013. The information requested by the Deputy is set out in Page 52 of the Expenditure Report 2013. The Estimate cost for implementation of Property Tax in 2013 is €25.9 million. In line with standard costs associated with administering and collecting taxes, it is expected that Administrative Budget provisions equivalent to 2% of the annual property tax yield will be required in 2014 and 2015, decreasing to 1% after 2015.

With regard to the Household Charge arrears for 2013, it is not possible to say at this stage what the estimated cost of administering this will be but it is not likely to be as high as the standard cost of 2% of the tax yield, given the likelihood of significant efficiencies being achieved in the collection of any such arrears when those arrears are effectively re-characterised as Local Property Tax from July 2013 onwards. The cost of administering and collecting the Household Charge in 2012 and arrears up to end June 2013 are a matter for the Local Government Management Agency (LGMA) and my colleague the Minister for Environment, Community and Local Government.

Household Charge Collection

57. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if he will indicate in the Budget 2013 documentation where account has been taken of the discontinuance of the household charge revenue in 2013 which was estimated at €160 million in 2012 and the discontinuance of the non principal private residence revenue, estimated at €70 million in 2012. [57389/12]

76. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 62 of 12 December 2012, if he will point out specifically where in the budget documentation the cessation of the household charge in 2013 is taken account of; and his views on whether fairer and more consistent presentation of the budget numbers would have involved netting off the cessation of the household charge, which was shown as tax revenue in the Budget 2012 documentation, against the projected yield from the new local property tax. [57575/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 57 and 76 together.

The Revised Estimates for Public Services 2012, published by my colleague, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, showed that revenues from the Household Charge were paid directly into the Local Government Fund (LGF) and used to fund Local Government services (Vote No. 25, Page 114). With revenues going directly to the LGF, this meant that the Exchequer was no longer required to make a subvention to the fund. As a result, the impact of

the charge was reflected as a reduction in Exchequer subventions to the LGF in Budget 2012 calculations, and not as a tax revenue. This reduction in Exchequer subventions to the LGF has been maintained for 2013, and is captured as such in the budgetary projections.

As a matter of budgetary consistency, the impact of the cessation of the Household Charge as a revenue raising measure will be reflected in the Revised Estimates for Public Services 2013, scheduled for publication next February. With regard to revenues from the Non-Principal Private Residence Charge, Budget 2013 outlines that the charge will cease with effect from 1 January 2014. In light of this, the impact of the discontinuance of this measure will be reflected in later publications.

Banking Sector Regulation

58. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the controls that exist in the Irish Bank Resolution Corporation to prevent employees, their spouses, family and associates from benefitting from confidential information obtained from the bank, in the purchase of property from persons and companies which have or have had loans with IBRC. [57395/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I have been informed that IBRC has a Conflicts of Interest Policy (the "Policy"). This policy outlines what the Bank's Board of Directors and the Group Executive Committee (GEXCO) believes are the essential standards of behaviour expected of employees. All directors and employees of the Bank and its relevant subsidiaries, in all jurisdictions, must adhere to the letter, spirit and intention of the principles set forth in this Policy. Directors and employees must also adhere to all additional policies and procedures in their local jurisdictions. The Policy specifically states that all directors and employees of the Bank have a duty to discharge their contracted duties and responsibilities to the Bank. Directors and employees must not influence, or be perceived to influence, any decisions directly or by association which could benefit connected borrowers and/or an entity in which they have an interest and, this includes any lending decisions, and/or implementation of debt management strategy decisions for connected borrowers.

In order to undertake their job properly, maintain objectivity and impartiality and ensure that judgement cannot be compromised, directors and employees must avoid being put in a position where their personal interests could conflict, or be perceived to conflict with the interests of the Bank. In addition, certain obligations arise under the Ethics in Public Office Acts 1995 and 2001 ('Ethics Acts') in respect of Irish Bank Resolution Corporation Limited ('the Bank') and its designated subsidiaries. Under these Regulations, all Irish employed directors and certain Irish employed employees of the Bank and its subsidiaries are required by law to comply with the provisions of the Ethics Acts.

Banking Sector Regulation

59. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the number of Irish Bank Resolution Corporation employees that have, either by themselves or with others, purchased property in each of 2011 and 2012 from persons or companies, which have or have had loans with IBRC. [57396/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I have been informed that IBRC does not have the requisite data to answer this parliamentary question. However all directors and employees of the Bank are governed by a Conflicts of Interest Policy. In addition, all Irish employed directors and certain Irish employees are governed by the Ethics in Public Office Acts

1995 and 2001.

Bank Debt Restructuring

60. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the protocols and practices taken by the Irish Bank Resolution Corporation to ensure that assets disposed of by IBRC itself, or its borrowers under the auspices of IBRC, are disposed of in a manner which maximises the return to the taxpayer from the disposal. [57397/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The overriding mandate of IBRC is to maximise the recovery of its loans on behalf of the State and by extension the taxpayer. I have been advised that the underlying approach of the Bank is to work constructively with each borrower on an individual basis to identify the most appropriate loan repayment plan. The strategies for loan recovery vary depending on the particular circumstances of the borrower. All credit related decisions are overseen by a multi-faceted governance structure established by the new Board of the Bank. Formal approvals for all credit decisions, including restructuring, extension of facilities, forbearance and disposal of assets are required from one or more of the Bank's Asset Quality Forums, Group Credit Committee, Transaction Review Committee, Investment Committee, the Board Risk and Compliance Committee, the Board of Directors and in certain instances the Department of Finance. I have been informed by the Bank that a fundamental tenet of this governance structure is that no single business unit or person in IBRC can individually determine the treatment of any borrower or group of borrowers.

Property Taxation Exemptions

61. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Finance with regard to the property tax, the reason that no exemptionor concession was given to persons who paid large amounts of stamp duty in recent years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57398/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Finance (Local Property Tax) Bill 2012 does not provide an exemption or concession for persons who paid large amounts of stamp duty. The Inter-Departmental Expert Group on the Design of a Property Tax (the "Thornhill Group") recommended against allowances for Stamp Duty because such allowances would not be targeted at need.

Pension Provisions

62. **Deputy Gerald Nash** asked the Minister for Finance if he will bring forward his decision announced in his recent budget speech in respect of the maximum allowable pension fund, to a point in 2013 as opposed to 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57414/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): In Budget 2013, I announced that changes to the maximum allowable pension fund at retirement for tax purposes (the Standard Fund Threshold - SFT) and other possible changes to give effect to the commitment in the Programme for Government to cap taxpayers' subsidies for pension schemes which deliver pension income of more than €60,000 will be put in place in 2014. The existing SFT regime is designed to cater for relatively small numbers of individuals. The current structure and operation of the regime, which applies across all pension arrangements in the private and public sectors, would not effectively or efficiently cope with an expected minimum ten-fold increase in the numbers

of individuals who would be affected by the Budget decision. A number of significant and fundamental changes to the current SFT regime may be required in order to deliver on the decision announced in the Budget. Alternatives to the use of the SFT regime to deliver on the Government's commitment will also be explored and consultations will be required with, among others, various Departments and this will take time. For these reasons, I am not in a position to accede to the request in the Deputy's question.

Financial Services Regulation

63. **Deputy Aodhán Ó Ríordáin** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide a detailed account of the way private monetary transactions between accounts that is bank transfers, in the State are monitored by the Revenue Commissioners; if there is a cut off amount on which such transactions would require inspection by the Revenue Commissioners to guarantee that they were tax compliant; if there is, the figure of said amount; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57415/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that they do not directly monitor private monetary transactions. However, Section 42 of the Criminal Justice (Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing) Act 2010 obliges banks, in addition to other designated bodies, to report any financial transaction, private or otherwise, to the Revenue Commissioners and An Garda Síochána where there is a suspicion that an offence of money laundering may have been committed. Section 7 of the Act defines money laundering as the laundering of the proceeds of criminal conduct. Section 6 of the Act includes Revenue offences in its definition of criminal conduct. The legislation does not specify any minimum amount for which a report must be made. Revenue assesses all such reports for appropriate action. In addition, financial institutions are required to make annual returns of information to Revenue, including the details of interest or interest-type payments over €635 in a year. This information is included in Revenue's Risk Analysis and Profiling system.

State Bodies Expenditure

64. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Finance the number of cases from 2008 to date in which the State Claims Agency was successful, but costs were awarded to the plaintiff; if he will indicate the total of such costs paid each year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57422/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): It is not possible to provide the information requested by the Deputy in the time available. However, I will be in contact with the Deputy when the information has been compiled.

Revenue Commissioners Investigations

65. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance if he will allocate additional resources to the Revenue Commissioners in 2013 to tackle the black economy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57437/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Shadow/hidden economy activity creates distortions in the economy and competitive disadvantages for compliant businesses. For these reasons, Revenue focuses on deterring shadow/hidden economy activity and non-com-

pliance through its audit and investigation programmes based on risk analysis, use of Revenue powers and their intelligence and information systems. I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that its compliance programmes are under constant review to ensure that they are focussed on the areas of greatest risk, including risks from the shadow economy, and that this approach contributes to optimising the effectiveness of their audit resources. The results of its audit and compliance programmes are published each year in the Revenue Annual Report and in 2011, Revenue carried out over 11,000 audits that resulted in additional yield of €440.5m to the Exchequer, with a further €81.3m collected from other compliance interventions and assurance checks,

The type of initiatives aimed specifically at shadow economy activity include:

- Joint Investigation activities with the Department of Social Protection aimed at uncovering either non-declaration or under declaration of income and/or fraudulent DSP claims;

- Strengthening tax legislation to provide for a robust framework within which the Revenue Commissioners may tackle tax and duty evasion, including recent provisions relating to the making of returns of transactions by merchant acquirers and the more effective investigation of white-collar crime;

- A comprehensive package of measures in relation to Excise (Oils) including, a requirement for separate licences for auto-fuel traders and marked fuel traders, a requirement to have a separate licence for every premises or place at which the fuel concerned is dealt in, and a requirement that a licence must be clearly displayed at the premises or place;

- Revenue's tobacco strategy, "Strategy On Combating the Illicit Tobacco Trade (2011-2013)" was published on the Revenue website in June 2011. This three-year strategy is underpinned by annual action plans;

- Regulations introduced in 2011 requiring Government Departments and State Bodies to supply details of payments made to the Revenue Commissioners;

- Revenue has a prioritised focus on those sectors that traditionally have been susceptible to shadow activity such as cash businesses. All possible sources of information, including following up on services advertised on TV, Radio, Local newspapers, Internet, special interest publications are used by Revenue;

- Holding meetings with trade and representative bodies through The Hidden Economy Monitoring Group where mutual interest issues are discussed;

- Focusing Revenue investigations on the use of computer programmes or electronic devices to alter or conceal sales records;

- Streetscape programmes, in which every cash business in an area is visited, without prior announcement, have been carried out to detect unregistered businesses and non-recording of cash sales.

The Deputy will appreciate that the scale and range of activities carried out by the Revenue Commissioners to tackle the shadow economy are extensive. In addition, the nature of these activities is highly resource intensive however, as is the case with all public service organisations, the Revenue Commissioners must play its part in meeting Government policy on reducing public service staffing numbers. I am satisfied that Revenue is optimising the outputs from its existing audit and compliance resource, and is affording as much priority as possible to shadow economy activities. I can further confirm that the question of resources for Revenue is kept under review by my colleague the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform in the context

of competing demands for resources across the public service.

Fuel Rebate Scheme

66. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Finance if the auto-diesel excise duty rebate relief will be extended to private coach operators; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57461/12]

82. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Finance if, in respect of budget 2013 whereby an excise rebate was announced on diesel for haulage companies to come into effect on 1 July 2013, he will indicate that same applies to passenger transport companies and particularly those involved in the coach and bus operation businesses; if in this context that the rebate definition would have to include the carriage of passengers by a motor vehicle of category M2 of category M3 as defined in Council Directive 70/156/EEC; if he will consider ensuring that the said rebate is extended to bus and coach companies in the forthcoming Finance Bill; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57605/12]

100. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Finance in view of his statement that under EU law a fuel rebate system may not be restricted to Irish licensed hauliers but would have to be extended to all vehicles intended exclusively for the carriage of goods by road with a maximum permissible gross laden weight of no less than 7.5 tonnes, as well as the carriage of passengers by a category M2 vehicle or category M3 vehicle; if it is lawful now to confine the fuel rebate scheme announced in the budget to goods vehicles only; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57740/12]

101. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Finance if permission has or will have to be sought from the EU for the essential users rebate for road haulage operators; the reason that was given for excluding vehicle for the carriage of passengers; if it is now intended to include M2 and M3 category passenger vehicles; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57741/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 66, 82, 100 and 101 together.

The proposal to introduce an auto-diesel excise duty relief for licensed road hauliers that I announced in the Budget is confined to licensed and tax compliant hauliers. However, I have received a number of submissions from, and on behalf of, private coach operators seeking to have this relief extended to them. I will consider this proposal in the context of the Finance Bill. I will inform the European Commission when the measure is introduced.

Pension Provisions

67. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Finance if legislative proposals furnished to him by this Deputy in relation to imposing a super-levy on bailed out bankers, former politicians and civil servants will be implemented; if not, if he will provide specific detailed reasons; if he has specific proposals of his own to tackle the unjust pensions currently being paid; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57477/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As the Deputy will be aware, Government pension policy formed a key theme of my recent Budget. In framing that Budget, I considered a range of complex issues and proposals relating to pensions policy including the draft

legislative proposals furnished by the Deputy. As the Deputy will appreciate, the pensions sector is a very important part of the financial services industry in Ireland and provides a service to enable people to make provision for their retirement and for their old age. As it is in everyone's best interest the Government wishes to encourage as many citizens as possible to continue to invest in pension schemes.

It is the case that some people have been allowed by previous Governments to benefit from hugely generous pension arrangements subsidised by the taxpayer. While this Government wants to encourage those on lower and middle incomes to save for pensions, it will not allow pensions of the scale previously allowed to be accumulated at the expense of taxpayers whose actual earnings are, in many cases, a fraction of those large pensions.

In Budget 2013, I set out this Government's policy on a number of important issues:

Tax relief on pension contributions will only serve to subsidise pension schemes that deliver income of up to €60,000 per annum. This will take effect from 1st January, 2014.

Tax relief on pension contributions will continue at the marginal rate of tax.

The Pension Levy announced as part of the Jobs Initiative will not be renewed after 2014.

Constitutional and legal constraints severely limit what steps the Government can take in relation to pensions already in payment. However, in order to ensure equity between all citizens based on their level of income, the reduced rate of USC for those over seventy with an income in excess of €60,000 will be discontinued from the 1st of January 2013 and the standard rates of USC will apply.

In addition, in the interest of fairness, Top Slicing relief will no longer be available from the 1st of January 2013 on ex-gratia lump sums in respect of termination and severance payments where the non-statutory payment is €200,000 or over. At present the individual's average tax rate for the previous three years applies to such lump sums rather than the marginal rate of 41 per cent.

I have been advised in numerous submissions of the value of allowing limited early withdrawal from AVCs. Therefore, in the forthcoming Finance Bill, I will make provision for persons with AVCs to withdraw up to 30 per cent of their value. Any amounts withdrawn will be subject to tax at the individual's marginal rate since marginal rate relief was provided on the contributions on the way in. The option will be available for a 3 year period from the passing of Finance Bill 2013. As the Deputy will be aware, the Bills Office is available to assist Deputies in developing and preparing any legislative proposals they may have. The Deputy may wish to consult with that office in relation to his legislative proposals on this matter.

Universal Social Charge Payments

68. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Finance if he will quantify the amount of money that could be raised by persons paying Class S PRSI, if they were liable to the 3% universal social charge on income in excess of €100,000; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57516/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The position is that individuals paying Class S PRSI are broadly self-employed income earners and proprietary directors. These individuals are already liable to a USC rate of 10% on income in excess of €100,000 per annum, being 3% higher from the USC rate applying to employees. I am advised by the Revenue

Commissioners that, assuming the enactment of changes announced in the 2013 Budget, the full year yield, estimated by reference to 2013 incomes, from increasing the existing rate of universal social charge by 3 percentage points to 13% on self-employed income earned in excess of €100,000 per annum would be of the order of €130 million.

The Universal Social Charge is an individualised charge and as such, the estimate of yield is based on individual incomes of more than €100,000. The estimated yield is based on confining the extension of the 3 percentage point rate increase to the portion of income which is in excess of €100,000, that is, the increase is not applied to the portion of total income earned up to €100,000. The figure is an estimate from the Revenue tax-forecasting model using actual data for the year 2010 adjusted as necessary for income and employment trends in the interim. It is, therefore, provisional and likely to be revised.

Property Valuations

69. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide a county breakdown of properties nationwide valued at less than €100,000; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57524/12]

74. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated number of properties nationwide valued at less than €100,000; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57549/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 69 and 74 together.

No database exists as yet containing the valuations of the housing stock in the State. Neither a nationwide or county breakdown of properties valued at less that €100,000 is therefore available. The estimated percentages of residential properties valued at less than €100,000 based on (a) the property price register and (b) data used in the Report of the Inter-Departmental Group on the Design of a Local Property Tax, chaired by Dr Don Thornhill (the "Thornhill Report") are as follows:

Band	Property Price Register	Thornhill Report
0-100000	27.4%	7.20%

In the absence of a property price register at the time of the Thornhill group, the group used unpublished Central Statistics Office (CSO) data based on mortgage transactions and the CSO's property price index to estimate a distribution of property values.

In Autumn 2012, a national register of property values was published for the first time based on actual transactions in the years 2010 to 2012. The register is published by the Property Services Regulatory Authority (PRSA) based on Stamp Duty data from the Revenue Commissioners and is updated on an on-going basis. The distribution from the register results in a higher incidence of higher value properties. However, caution should be applied to this approach given the low number of transactions, the high percentage of non-mortgage transactions (i.e., cash transactions) and the possible bias in recent transactions towards transactions of higher quality housing stock which may not represent the generality of housing valuations in the State.

Budget Submissions

70. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Finance the reason the VFI proposals to introduce a €250 million lid levy was not adopted in budget 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57545/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Deputy will be aware that I received a large number of pre-Budget submissions including a proposal for the introduction of a lid-on levy from vintners' organisations. Preliminary advice suggests that the proposal may not be consistent with the EU Directive concerning the general arrangements for excise duty on alcohol products.

Tax Code

71. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Finance the reason the €120 million proposal to place a 1c levy on SMS and MMS was not adopted in Budget 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57546/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The total number of SMS and MMS messages sent in the twelve months to the end of June 2012 was in the region of 12.6 billion. This would suggest a yield of c. €126 million from a 1 cent levy on such messages. However, the projected yield from such a levy cannot be directly inferred from the total number of messages sent, as the levy's imposition could result in considerable behavioural impact among consumers, and could have significant implications for the charging arrangements of providers. The matter will be kept under review by my Department. I am aware of the recent introduction of a similar tax in Hungary.

While any additional revenue would be welcome in the current circumstances, wider social and economic factors which may militate against the introduction of a further tax on text messages would also have to be taken into account. Mobile phone calls and text messages are already subject to VAT at 23%. An additional flat rate levy of the order referred to by the Deputy on text messages could significantly increase the overall rate of taxation on mobile phone accounts, particularly given that the average monthly spend per user is of the order of €35.

Tax Code

72. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Finance the reason a windfall winnings tax, such as the taxes in place in many other countries and recently adopted by Spain, was not adopted in budget 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57547/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The receipt by a person of any sum bona fide by way of windfall winnings from betting or from any licensed lottery including the National Lottery is exempt from Income Tax, Capital Gains Tax and Capital Acquisitions Tax. A tax such as is proposed in the question could affect income for the National Lottery, the surplus from which may be used for national culture, including the Irish language; the arts, within the meaning of the Arts Act 1951; the health of the community; and for youth, welfare, national heritage and amenities. For reasons of equity, a windfall winnings tax such as is proposed in the question might have to be imposed on winnings from other lotteries, which could affect fundraising by charities and sports clubs. I have no plans to introduce a levy on windfall winnings at this time.

Property Taxation Application

73. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Finance the way property tax rates proposed in this jurisdiction compare with rates in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57548/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Northern Ireland domestic rate is made up of two parts. The regional rate is set by central government and makes up c. 55 per cent of the rates bill; it is used to pay for services such as roads, education and health. From 1 April 2011, the regional rate, expressed in terms of pence per pound, for domestic properties, was 0.3698 pence (in 2010/11 it was 0.3608). The district rate, which is in addition to the regional rate, is fixed annually by individual councils and is their main source of income (over 75% of total income).

The Local Property Tax will have a central national rate of 0.18% on values up to €1 million and 0.25% on the balance over €1 million, but from 2015 local authorities will have the power to vary the rate by 15% above or below the national central rate. I have made a commitment that the central national rate will not change for the lifetime of this Government. The average domestic rates bill in Northern Ireland in 2011 was £789 (c. €964). For LPT purposes, it is estimated that 85% to 90% of properties will be valued at €300,000 or less, and the maximum amount of LPT payable on such properties will be €247 in 2013 (half year charge) and €495 in 2014 (full year charge).

Question No. 74 answered with Question No. 69.

Alcohol Pricing

75. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Finance in view of the deliberations in budget 2013, if he will quantify the amount of potential lost revenue to the State by the selling of alcohol in supermarket outlets at prices below the cost at which the supermarkets bought the product; if he will quantify the amount paid by the State as a VAT rebate in 2011 in respect of alcohol pricing by supermarkets and other multiples; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57553/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): With regard to the VAT treatment of below cost selling, VAT is a tax on the value added to a supply, and the collection and recovery of VAT takes place at each stage of the chain of supply from manufacturing to retailer. Under EU and domestic VAT rules traders who are registered for VAT collect VAT on the goods and services that they sell. In turn such traders are entitled to recover the VAT they incur on their business inputs used in the purchase or production of goods or delivery of services. Consequently, if there is a decrease in value at any stage in the process the trader is entitled to a refund of the excess of VAT incurred over that collected.

In this case, where a retailer is in a situation of net VAT gain as a result of below cost selling, this is not a loss to the Exchequer or an additional benefit to the retailer, it is merely how VAT is charged. As regards calculating the VAT impact of below cost sales of alcohol, separate figures are not available for input VAT on goods that were subsequently sold at a discount because traders' VAT returns show only the total input VAT and the total output VAT for the period covered by the return.

Question No. 76 answered with Question No. 57.

Mortgage Debt

77. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of regulated financial institutions that have sold all or part of their mortgage loan books in the past three years; the protection that mortgage holders are entitled to when such sales occur to institutions that are not covered by the mortgage arrears resolution process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57591/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Central Bank has advised me that the sale of a mortgage book is a commercial matter for the financial institutions concerned. However, I have been informed that Allied Irish Bank and Bank of Ireland have sold all or part of their loan book in the past three years. In relation to other financial institutions which provide mortgages, the Central Bank has advised me that the information requested by the Deputy is not available.

The Central Bank has also advised me that the Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears (CCMA) applies to the mortgage lending activities of all regulated financial institutions except credit unions, operating in the State, including:

- a financial services institution authorised, registered or licensed by the Central Bank of Ireland and

- a financial services institution authorised, registered or licensed in another EU or EEA Member State and which has provided, or is providing, mortgage lending activities in the State.

Where regulated financial institutions sell part, or all, of their mortgage book to another regulated financial institution, the same protections apply to borrowers, namely, the CCMA and the Consumer Protection Code. Where a regulated financial institution outsources part, or all, of their mortgage book, the same protections apply to borrowers and the institutions have responsibility for ensuring that these protections are applied by the outsourced company. Where a regulated financial institution sells part, or all, of a mortgage book to an unregulated institution, then the borrower will not be afforded the same level of protections. In their case, the conditions of the original contract will apply.

Mortgage Interest Relief Application

78. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of mortgage customers whose mortgage interest relief has been stopped in 2012 due to arrears or non payment in respect of their mortgage; the guidelines he has issued regarding same; if a person may have their mortgage interest relief re-instated once their repayments are once again on schedule; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57592/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): This is a matter for the Revenue Commissioners who are responsible for the administration of mortgage interest relief through the tax relief at source system. I am advised by Revenue that where cumulative mortgage arrears exist for a period exceeding 18 months, there is a requirement on lenders to notify Revenue so that a determination can be made as to continued eligibility, or otherwise, on a case-by-case basis. Where an amount of interest is being paid, mortgage relief will continue to be granted in accordance with the relevant interest relief provisions. Lenders are also required to report

cases to Revenue where payments have not been made for a six-month period to allow continued eligibility for the relief on an individual basis to be determined. Where the relief is ceased it can be restored once three consecutive mortgage payments have been made. I am informed by Revenue that some 6,982 accounts have been ceased for mortgage interest relief in 2012 due to non-payment.

Credit Unions Regulation

79. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if lending restrictions have been applied to a credit union (details supplied) by the Central Bank of Ireland [57593/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The imposition of lending restrictions is the responsibility of the Registrar of Credit Unions, who is the independent regulator for credit unions. Within his independent regulatory discretion, the Registrar acts to support the prudential soundness of individual credit unions, to maintain sector stability and to protect the savings of credit union members. As Minister for Finance, my role is to ensure that the legal framework for credit unions is appropriate for the effective operation and supervision of credit unions. The Central Bank cannot comment on matters in relation to individual credit unions. Any regulatory action by the Central Bank is taken with the specific purpose of protecting members' savings.

Promissory Note Negotiations

80. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if an indicative timetable has been agreed with the European Central Bank in respect of ELA lending made by the Central Bank of Ireland to Irish Bank Resolution Corporation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57594/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Promissory Notes and other banking assets act as collateral in relation to exceptional liquidity assistance (ELA) loan (repo) agreements between IBRC and the Central Bank of Ireland (CBI). Repayments on the Promissory Notes and cash generated from banking assets provide cash to IBRC which is available to reduce outstanding ELA. Such repayments of the Promissory Notes and cash flows from IBRC's banking assets will repay ELA over time. The ELA itself is funded by the CBI through Intra-Eurosystem liabilities and any repayments of ELA are used to reduce this liability on the Central Bank's balance sheet. Other than that there is no link between the Promissory Notes and ELA. Whilst there is an implicit link between the current repayment schedule on the Promissory Note and ELA, as described above, there is no specific repayment schedule, as such, in relation to ELA.

Universal Social Charge Payments

81. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Finance if he will outline the situation whereby public servants receive arrears as salary paid to them in 2012 which relate to 2010 and 2011; the level at which the universal social charge is payable in respect of these arrears; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57596/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The position is that Universal Social Charge (USC) is payable on aggregate income arising in the tax year. This includes any arrears, bonuses or deferred pay that may be paid during the year. Therefore, where any individual re-

ceives arrears of salary in 2012 which relate to 2010 or 2011, USC is chargeable in 2012.

The standard rates of Universal Social Charge for 2012 are:

- 2% on the first €10,036

- 4% on the next €5,980

- 7% on the balance.

An individual whose total income for a year does not exceed €10,036 is exempt from USC. Further information on the USC is available from the Revenue website at: http://www.revenue.ie/en/tax/usc/index.html.

Question No. 82 answered with Question No. 66.

Tax Collection Forecasts

83. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No.4 of 6 December 2012 in which he estimated a total revenue of €395 million from the taxation of child benefit, the rate and amount of tax a month that would be deducted from child benefit in the examples (detailed supplied) this information to be furnished in tabular form. [57609/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As I stated in my reply to Parliamentary Question No.4 of 6 December 2012, the issue and the yield from taxing Child Benefit is fully dependent on resolving a number of significant and complex policy and legal issues before the question of implementing a charge to taxation on this payment can be considered. These policy issues include clearly determining who is the owner of the Child Benefit payment, whether by taxing the payment, there follows an entitlement to the PAYE tax credit, how the payment is treated for tax purposes in the hands of jointly assessed couples and legal issues surrounding the tax treatment of married couples and co-habiting couples.

In view of the considerable legal and policy issues involved, it is extremely difficult to estimate the tax liability that may arise in each specific case as a result of taxation of Child Benefit. However, if all of the above issues were resolved and it was assumed that the mother is the recipient and owner of the child benefit payment, then the taxation of Child Benefit would result in three possible tax outcomes:

1. An individual would pay no income tax on their child benefit as their tax credits would be sufficient to reduce their tax liability to zero.

2. An individual would pay tax on their child benefit at the standard rate of tax.

3. An individual would pay tax on their child benefit at the higher rate of tax.

The tableis provided purely for illustration purposes to demonstrate the tax liability that may arise in respect of a Child Benefit payment for one child under each of the different tax outcomes.

Different Cases	Child Benefit in respect of one child	Tax liability on Child Benefit
Case 1 No tax due	€1,560	Nil
Case 2 (taxed at 20%)	€1,560	€312

Different Cases	Child Benefit in respect of one child	Tax liability on Child Benefit
Case 3 (taxed at 41%)	€1,560	€640

Furthermore, as I previous stated, I understand that the Advisory Group on Tax and Social Welfare, established by the Minister for Social Protection, has considered these and other issues in relation to Child Benefit in the context of a report on child and family income supports which is being considered by the Minister.

Tax Code

84. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for Finance the cost to the Exchequer of allowing unmarried couples for joint assessment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57610/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that, as unmarried cohabiting couples are not separately identified in tax statistics, it is not possible to provide the precise information requested by the Deputy. However, in the event that a formal registration scheme for unmarried cohabiting couples were introduced, it is estimated that the cost of extending married treatment under the income tax code to such couples could be of the order of €1 million per annum for every 1,000 unmarried couples registered.

Mortgage Arrears Rate

85. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the level of arrears across the buy-to-let mortgage book; the Government's strategy for dealing with the problem; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57611/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Deputy will be aware that the Central Bank of Ireland recently published its mortgage arrears data for end of September 2012 which, for the first time, included data on buy-to-let properties. This data can be found on the Central Bank's website www.centralbank.ie and indicates that 17.9% of buy to let mortgage accounts (25.5% in terms of balance amounts) were in arrears of more than 90 days. The focus by Government is primarily on formulating and implementing appropriate measures to assist those homeowners who are experiencing genuine difficulty with the mortgage repayments on their principal home. In that regard, the Report of the Inter-Departmental Working Group on Mortgage Arrears ("Keane Report") which was published in October 2011, made a number of key recommendations and the Government is now actively progressing the implementation of those main recommendations. However, some of these initiatives will also be of assistance in addressing significant 'buy to let' mortgage arrears and over indebtedness.

For example, the personal insolvency reforms will be of significant benefit to all insolvent debtors and their creditors as it will enable unsustainable debt positions to be addressed in a holistic way. In particular, the Personal Insolvency Arrangement framework for secured debt is formulated in such a way that it will also allow in the context of the whole of debt situation of the debtor for unsustainable 'buy to let' mortgage debts to be dealt with under arrangements formulated by the Personal Insolvency Practitioner and agreed between debtor and creditor. However, the particular protection provisions in the personal insolvency legislation regarding the principal private residence will not be available to 'buy to let' mortgages or any other se-

cured debts.

Also, under the Mortgage Arrears Resolution structure overseen by the Central Bank, mortgage lenders are required to develop and implement appropriate resolution strategies and implementation plans for 'buy to let' mortgages as well as mortgages on the debtor's primary home. In that regard, it is noted that 22,553 'buy to let' mortgages were 'restructured' at the end of September 2012.

Promissory Note Negotiations

86. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if, in the absence of an agreement with the European Central Bank to restructure the liability, it is his intention to pay the €3.1 billion due to the Irish Bank Resolution Corporation on 31 March 2013 in respect of the promissory note [57613/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I have previously stated that I am working to try and achieve a solution before the next scheduled instalment on the Promissory Note scheduled for next March. It would be very difficult for Ireland to make a payment on that date and so we continue to work on a deal with our European partners. I remind Deputies that the Government, together with all other 26 member states at the Euro Summit in October last year committed that:

> As far as our general approach to private sector involvement in the euro area is concerned, we reiterate our decision taken on 21 July 2011 that Greece requires an exceptional and unique solution. All other euro area Member States solemnly reaffirm their inflexible determination to honour fully their own individual sovereign signature and all their commitments to sustainable fiscal conditions and structural reforms. The euro area Heads of State fully support this determination as the credibility of all their sovereign signatures is a decisive element for ensuring financial stability in the euro area as a whole.

> The Irish Government will honour this commitment and will ensure that we work with our EU partners to address the situation in relation to the overall cost to the State of resolving the difficulties in our banking sector. This Government has consistently worked towards a consensual approach to decisions made with our European colleagues.

Banking Sector Redundancies

87. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide details of the number of AIB employees who have applied to avail of the voluntary redundancy scheme; the estimated total cost of the voluntary redundancy scheme; if he will confirm the existing number of employees at the bank and the optimum number being targeted on the conclusion of the redundancy programme. [57614/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): AIB announced earlier in 2012 its intention to achieve a minimum of 2,500 voluntary redundancies by 2014 as part of a material cost-cutting drive to return the bank to viability. The voluntary exit programme is comprised of an Early Retirement (ER) programme and a Voluntary Severance (VS) Program. The ER component was opened to all areas of the bank and is now closed for future applications. The VS component has been staggered across different areas of the organisation and will be implemented on a phased basis out to 2014 depending on the needs of the business. I have been informed that as part of its regular reporting cycle, AIB will provide updates on headcount and

operational costs, including updated costs with respect to the Exit Programme, as part of its annual results announcement in Q1 2013. AIB has also informed me that to date, the level of applications for ER and VS has exceeded 2,500 and AIB is therefore confident of attaining its minimum target reduction by 2014 on a purely voluntary basis while ensuring appropriate business risks are monitored and contained and appropriate customer service levels are maintained.

Banking Sector Remuneration

88. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance when he expects to have the Mercer report on remuneration levels within the covered institutions to hand; when he expects to make decisions in respect of same and when he plans to publish the report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57615/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am expecting the consultant's draft report on a Review of Remuneration Practices & Frameworks at the Covered Institutions to be delivered by the end of the year, whereupon the findings will be reviewed by my Department and consultations with the various stakeholders will commence. I fully recognise that there is a real public interest in the levels of remuneration at the covered institutions. I will endeavour to have the details underpinning the review published in the shortest timeframe possible.

Fiscal Policy

89. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the anticipated adjustment in budget 2014; if he will confirm the split between taxation and expenditure measures; and if he will confirm the amount of the adjustment that is already accounted for by way of carry forward of measures announced in budget 2013. [57616/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): In my Budget Statement on 5 December last, I informed the House that the projected consolidation for 2014 and 2015 of €3.1 billion and €2 billion respectively is unchanged from the figures published in the Medium-Term Fiscal Statement three weeks before Budget 2013. The 2014 target for revenue consolidation is €1.1 billion, with €2 billion for expenditure consolidation. Around €600 million of the revenue consolidation will be provided through carry forward from measures announced in Budget 2013. This estimate of carry forward is inclusive of an estimated €200 million yield resulting from changes to take effect in 2014 to the maximum allowable pension fund, which was outlined in the Summary of 2013 Budget Measures. With regard to expenditure measures, over €100 million of the €2 billion expenditure consolidation outlined for 2014 will arise as a result of policy measures implemented in 2013. These savings mainly arise in the areas of social welfare, education and health spending. It should be noted that much of the carryover savings will go towards meeting the 2014 expenditure ceilings as set out for Departments in the Expenditure Report 2013.

Additional Voluntary Contributions

90. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance further to his projection that allowing pre-retirement access to funded additional voluntary contributions will yield €100 million in 2013, if he will confirm the total value of draw down in 2013 upon which he is basing this yield; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57617/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): In my Budget 2013 speech, I announced that I would make provision in Finance Bill 2013 for persons making Additional Voluntary Contributions (AVCs) used to supplement their retirement benefits to withdraw up to 30% of the value of those contributions. Any amounts withdrawn will be subject to tax at the individual's marginal rate. The option will be available for three years from the passing of the Finance Bill. This is a measure which will enable rather than incentivise individuals to access certain pension savings prior to retirement as I would also wish that people continue to provide for their retirement. As a result, the estimated Exchequer yield of €200 million over three years is conservative and is based on the assumption that 10% of the value of funded AVCs used to supplement retirement benefits (estimated at about €5.5 billion) will be drawn down over the period with half of that amount being drawn down in the first year.

Pension Provisions

91. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide a detailed statement of the basis of the estimated yield in 2014 of €250 million from proposed changes to the maximum allowable pension fund; the persons he now intends to consult with regarding this proposal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57618/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): On page A10 of the Budget 2013 booklet which accompanied my Budget speech, I indicated that the full-year yield from changes to the maximum allowable pension fund at retirement for tax purposes (the Standard Fund Threshold), together with other possible changes to be put in place in 2014 to give effect to the commitment in the Programme for Government to cap taxpayers' subsidies for pension schemes which deliver pension income of more than €60,000, is estimated at €250 million. The Budget 2013 booklet makes clear, however, that the estimated full-year savings are provisional at this time as further detailed analysis of the necessary changes and their impact will be required. As I mentioned in my Budget Speech, consultation on the specific changes required to the existing pension regime will continue with, among others, the pensions sector and the Departments of Public Expenditure and Reform and Social Protection.

Universal Social Charge Payments

92. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated number of pensioners that will be affected by the increase in the universal social charge for persons aged 70 years of age and over earning €60,000 or more. [57619/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that the estimated number of income earners aged 70 years of age and over, estimated by reference to 2013 incomes, who will be affected by the budgetary increase in the universal social charge for persons aged 70 years of age and over and earning €60,000 or more is estimated at approximately 8,900. I am also advised by the Revenue Commissioners that while social welfare pensions can be separately identified from other sources of income in Revenue statistics, it is not possible to do so in respect of income from other pensions. Consequently, there is no complete or reliable basis available to Revenue on which an estimate of the number of pensioners that will be affected by the increase in the universal social charge rates could be compiled. The figure is an estimate from the Revenue tax-forecasting model using actual data for 2010 adjusted as necessary for income and employment trends in the interim. It is, therefore, provisional and likely to be revised.

Alcohol Sales

93. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the budget measures that specifically affect the off licence alcohol trade. [57621/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Deputy will be aware of the measures taken in relation to the excise on alcohol products in the Budget, namely an increase of 10 cent on a pint of beer or cider or a measure of spirits, and a €1 increase on a standard bottle of wine (all VAT inclusive), with pro rata increases on other alcohol products. These measures do not specifically affect the off-trade but will, if passed on, affect both the on- and off-trades.

Carbon Budget

94. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the impact of the extension of carbon tax to solid fuels on the price of smokeless coal and non-smokeless coal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57622/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The application of the carbon tax to solid fuels i.e. coal and commercial peat will mean, from 1 May 2013, an increase in price of €1.20 in the case of coal (40kg bag) based on current prices.

Exchequer Deficit

95. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide details of the Exchequer borrowing requirement in 2013 and 2014 taking into account cash on hand, projected Exchequer deficits and the maturity of Government bonds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57623/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The data requested by the Deputy, which has been provided by my Department and the National Treasury Management Agency, is provided. The Funding requirement for 2013 and 2014, consisting of the projected Exchequer deficit and Government bonds, is set out in the table.

-	2013	2014
-	€ billion	€ billion
Exchequer deficit	15.4	11.6
5% Bond April 2013	-5.1	-
4% Bond January 2014	-	-7.6
-	-	- Source: Department of Finance and NTMA

The funding requirement will be financed by borrowings and changes in Exchequer cash balances. The end 2012 projected Exchequer cash balance will be some €20 billion.

Funds in the Exchequer are used for the ongoing payments necessary for running the State. In addition to these day-to-day costs, there are two large debt redemptions that are scheduled for 2013 and 2014 as detailed in the table above.

Property Taxation Application

96. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of residential properties that he estimates will be liable for the local property tax; if this number is consistent with the number of properties that have been liable for the household charge in 2012. [57625/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that they are currently developing the register of residential properties for the purposes of the Local Property Tax (LPT) and it is not possible to say definitively at this stage what the number of liable properties will be. However, the Revenue Commissioners further advise that the number is estimated to be in the region of 1.9 million properties, but this is a tentative estimate at this stage. I am further informed that the number of properties liable to the Household Charge was estimated to be 1.6 million. The additional properties liable to LPT reflect the exemption provisions in the Finance (Local Property Tax) Bill 2012 which differ from those in the Local Government (Household Charge) Act 2011.

Credit Availability

97. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of new lending approved and drawn down, as opposed to renewals or bundling of existing credit facilities by each of AIB and Bank of Ireland in 2012; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57633/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Bank of Ireland in a press release on 17 December "confirmed that it has achieved and will exceed its €3.5bn SME lending target for 2012. This figure represents the Bank's approvals for new and increased credit facilities for businesses and farmers. Credit approved for customers seeking restructured facilities are excluded from these figures as reported by Bank of Ireland."

The bank considers that the actual amounts drawn down by SMEs which have been approved for credit is commercially sensitive information and does not release it.

AIB reports that it has approved credit of €3.75 billion to date and that €660m relates to New Lending.

The lending targets imposed on the two pillar banks are only a part of the Government's strategy to ensure that viable SMEs are able to access the credit they need. In my recent budget statement, I announced a ten point tax reform plan to help small businesses. I also announced the sanctioning of the appointment of additional reviewers in the Credit Review Office to ensure that SMEs appealing the banks' decisions to decline credit receive a considered and timely response to their application. We are currently engaged in a public consultation process in order to see what more the Credit Review Office can do to ensure SMEs are getting the support on bank lending they require and I would welcome any proposals from the Deputy on this topic which can be submitted to *croassessment@finance.gov.ie*. I would strongly urge viable SMEs to appeal any refusals of credit to the Credit Review Office.

Credit Availability

98. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the extent to which efforts have been made to monitor the degree to which lending agencies have restricted or refused credit to the self–employed over the past 12 months; if difficulties the self-employed have experienced in meeting their tax liabilities have been directly linked to a gradual diminution

or restriction of credit to the sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57653/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Government has imposed SME lending targets on the two domestic pillar banks for the three calendar years, 2011 to 2013. Both banks were required to sanction lending of at least €3 billion in 2011, €3.5 billion this year and €4 billion in 2013 for new or increased credit facilities to SMEs. Both banks achieved their 2011 targets and are expected to achieve their 2012 targets. The Deputy knows that SMEs include self employed people. In addition to the lending targets imposed on the banks, the pillar banks are required to submit their lending plans to the Department and the Credit Review Office (CRO) at the beginning of each year, outlining how they intend to achieve their lending targets. My Department, in conjunction with the CRO, subsequently analyses the plans and meets the banks to discuss any issues of note. The banks also meet with my Department and the CRO on a quarterly basis to discuss progress. The monthly management meetings with the pillar banks also provide a forum for the issue of SME lending to be raised by my Department.

In terms of rejection rates from banks, I would remind the Deputy that the CRO can review decisions by the pillar banks to refuse, reduce or withdraw credit facilities, including applications for restructured credit facilities, from €1,000 up to €500,000. The CRO is currently overturning 55% of the refusal decisions referred to them and I would appeal to any self employed business people who have been refused credit by the banks to avail of the services of the CRO.

The banks report by sector and geographical region but do not report on the basis of the structure of the SME, whether it is a sole trader, self employed, limited company etc. The recent Red C survey shows a credit decline rate of 29% for micro enterprises which would include self employed but does note that the numbers of self employed sampled would not be statistically robust. This rate is an improvement on the two previous surveys.

The Deputy should be aware that the Microenterprise Loan Fund Act provides for a scheme which will facilitate up to €40million in additional lending to microenterprises over the next five years. Furthermore, the Temporary Partial Credit Guarantee Scheme can facilitate up to €150m per annum of additional credit. This is designed for SME's who, because of lack of collateral or because of the specialised sector they operate in, face difficulties in accessing bank credit.

It is vital that the banks continue to make credit available to support economic recovery. However, it is not in the interest of the banks, businesses or the economy for finance to be provided unless the business is viable and has the capacity to meet the interest payments and repay the sum borrowed.

Mortgage Interest Relief Expenditure

99. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Finance his estimate of the amount of tax forgone through the application of mortgage interest relief to landlords; if he will provide a breakdown of this amount between commercial and residential landlords and the number of people claiming relief in both cases; the number and value of cases where relief is being claimed for a property outside the Republic of Ireland; the number and value of new claims in the past three years for which figures are available with a breakdown by residential and commercial landlords; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57696/12]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Landlords cannot claim mortgage interest relief which is only available for owner occupiers in respect of their principal private residence. I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that landlords may deduct interest on

money borrowed to purchase, improve or repair commercial property from the gross rent when computing their rental profits for tax purposes on that property. Interest incurred before the first occupation of the property by a tenant for the purposes of a trade or undertaking, or between lettings, is not deductible.

Based on personal income tax returns filed by non-PAYE taxpayers for the tax years 2008 to 2010, the latest years available, the amount of tax foregone by allowing a deduction for interest on borrowings to be offset against domestic rental income assessable under Case V, Schedule D for both residential and commercial property and the number of claims by individual taxpayers is as shown in the following table. It is not possible to break down these costs between commercial and residential property.

Tax Year	Tax Cost	Number of Claims
2008	€1,210m	112,195
2009	€763m	117,984
2010	€679m*	123,167

*This is an update of an estimate of €660 million provided on 29 May last in my reply to Parliamentary Question number 26184/12 .

In relation to interest claimed as a deduction against foreign rental income , based on personal income tax returns filed by non-PAYE taxpayers for the tax years 2009 to 2010, the latest years available, the following table shows the estimated tax costs and the number of claims by individual taxpayers. The personal income tax returns for 2008 in respect of foreign rental income did not separately identify allowable interest from other expenses and therefore information is not shown for that year.

Tax Year	Tax Cost	Number of Claims
2009	€71m	11,773
2010	€69m	13,522

New claims cannot be separately identified from ongoing claims in the data source and accordingly the relevant details of these cannot be shown separately.

These estimates are based on assuming that tax relief was allowed at the top income tax rate of 41% and the figure provided could, therefore, be regarded as the maximum Exchequer cost in respect of those taxpayers. I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that they are not in a position to provide data for 2011 as the tax returns for that year are not yet fully processed. The figures shown in both tables are subject to adjustment in the event of late returns being filed or where returns already filed are subsequently amended.

It should be noted that any corresponding data returned by PAYE taxpayers in the income tax return form 12 is not captured in the Revenue computer system. However, any PAYE taxpayer with non-PAYE income greater than €3,174 is required to complete an income tax return form 11. This return is the source of the figures provided in this reply. As rental income of companies is returned as net of interest on borrowings, the figures for interest are not separately distinguishable and there is, therefore, no basis on which an estimate of the cost in respect of companies can be given.

Questions No. 100 and 101 answered with Question No. 66.

Student Grant Scheme Applications

102. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when will a student grant issue in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57365/12]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Officials in my Department have confirmed with Student Universal Support Ireland that on the 16th November, 2012 a request for further documentation was issued to the student referred to by the Deputy. When the requested documentation is returned the student will be notified directly of the outcome.

Student Grant Scheme Applications

103. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a decision will be made on a Student Universal Support Ireland grant application in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57368/12]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Officials in my Department have confirmed with Student Universal Support Ireland that on the 19th December, 2012 SUSI contacted the student referred to by the Deputy requesting further documentation. When the requested documentation is returned the student will be notified directly of the outcome.

Pupil-Teacher Ratio

104. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the rationale for altering the pupil-teacher ratio for further education colleges; the likely effect this will have on youth unemployment and for the long term unemployed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57369/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): There are 32,688 approved Post Leaving Cert (PLC) places available nationwide and this number of places is being maintained.

PLC places are allocated to Vocational Education Committees (VECs), Community and Comprehensive and Voluntary Secondary schools on an annual basis following an application process and VECs are responsible for the further allocation of those places to schools and colleges under their remit. While it would have been preferable not to have to make any changes, by bringing the pupil teacher ratio (PTR) for PLC courses into line with that of free second level schools, e.g., 19:1, the Government has succeeded in protecting class sizes in primary and free second-level schools for the coming year, ensuring that our limited resources are rightly focussed on the children in our education system. The change will yield estimated savings of €12 million in a full year and €4 million in 2013 because the change will only come into effect from September 2013. The change will reduce the number of teaching posts by 200 in PLC courses and may lead to some reduction in subject choices for students. It is now up to VEC CEOs and principals to plan for September 2013 to ensure they can continue to deliver programmes which closely meet the needs of both students and employers.

Student Grant Scheme Applications

105. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a third level education grant will be issued to a person (details supplied) in County Carlow; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57370/12]

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

The student referred to by the Deputy had her application cancelled by SUSI as it was incomplete. On 22nd November, 2012 a letter was issued by SUSI to the student informing her that her application was cancelled and advising her to reapply.

When re-applying for a student grant it will be necessary for the student to complete all sections of the application form.

Schools Building Projects Status

106. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the proposal to provide a new school (details supplied) in County Cavan; when this project will proceed to the next stage; the timescale for construction; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57412/12]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): As the Deputy will be aware, a project for a new building for the school to which he refers is included in the 5 year construction programme that I announced last March. It is my Department's intention that this project will proceed to construction in the period 2015/16.The current status of all projects on the school building programme, including the school in question, may be viewed on my Department's website at www.education.ie. and this is being updated regularly throughout the year.

Schools Refurbishment

107. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding an application for refurbishment of a school (details supplied); the length of time the request has been with his Department; the steps taken in processing the application to date; the reason it has not yet been approved; the estimated cost of the project and the options regarding funding schemes available; if a summary of the technical report on the school will be given; if he has particular departmental policy on the funding of these small minority schools; if approval will now be given for approval and the processing stages which need to be gone through before approval to go to contract is given. [57428/12]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The building project for the school referred to by the Deputy is currently at an advanced stage of architectural planning. My Department has recently approved the stage 2(a) submission and authorised the project to proceed to Stage 2(b) of Architectural Planning which includes application for Planning Permission, Fire Certification, Disability Access Certification (DAC) and the preparation of tender documents. The Deputy will understand that my Department does not disclose the estimated cost of individual projects prior to a tender process due to commercial sensitivities.

My Department makes no distinction based on denomination between primary schools in

respect of capital funding applications.

Due to competing demands on my Department's capital budget, imposed by the need to prioritise the limited funding available for the provision of additional school accommodation to meet increasing demographic requirements, it was not possible to include this project in the five year construction programme announced earlier this year.

Schools which have not been included in the five year construction programme, including the one referred to by the Deputy, but which were announced for initial inclusion in the building programme will continue to be progressed to final planning stages in anticipation of the possibility of further funds being available to my Department in future years. The project referred to by the Deputy remains available to be considered for progression in that context.

Student Grant Scheme Applications

108. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if an application for grant assistance made through Student Universal Support Ireland in respect of a person (details supplied) will be approved. [57429/12]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Officials in my Department have confirmed with Student Universal Support Ireland that on the 13th December, 2012 a request for further documentation was issued to the student referred to by the Deputy. When the requested documentation is returned the student will be notified directly of the outcome.

Student Grant Scheme Applications

109. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a person (details supplied) in County Mayo may expect to have their higher education grant application processed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57433/12]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Officials in my Department have confirmed with Student Universal Support Ireland that, in the case of the student referred to by the Deputy, her application is currently being assessed and a letter will issue shortly to the student outlining the position when a decision is made.

Schools Building Projects Status

110. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will provide an update in relation to the possibility of having a proposed building project restored to his Department's school building programme (details supplied) in County Cavan; if this project will be prioritised in view of the over-reliance on temporary accommodation at this school where enrolment has grown rapidly over the past number of years and where the long-term permanent accommodation needs of the school have been accepted for some time by his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57463/12]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The building project for the school referred to by the Deputy is currently at an advanced stage of architectural planning. My Department has authorised the project to proceed to Stage 2(b) of Architectural Planning which includes application for Planning Permission, Fire Certification, Disability Access Certification (DAC) and the preparation of tender documents.

Due to competing demands on my Department's capital budget, imposed by the need to prioritise the limited funding available for the provision of additional school accommodation to meet increasing demographic requirements, it was not possible to include this project in the five year construction programme announced earlier this year.

Schools which have not been included in the five year construction programme, including the one referred to by the Deputy, but which were announced for initial inclusion in the building programme will continue to be progressed to final planning stages in anticipation of the possibility of further funds being available to my Department in future years. The project referred to by the Deputy remains available to be considered for progression in that context.

Schools Building Projects Applications

111. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress made to date in having a proposed building project for a school (details supplied) in County Cavan restored to his Department's school building programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57464/12]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The major building project for the school referred to by the Deputy is at an early stage of architectural planning.The design team recently completed the revised Stage 2(a) (Developed Sketch Design). Once the stage 2(a) is approved, the project will progress to stage 2(b) which includes applications for planning permission, Fire Safety Certification, Disability Access Certification and the preparation of tender documents. Due to competing demands on my Department's capital budget, imposed by the need to prioritise the limited funding available for the provision of additional school accommodation to meet increasing demographic requirements, it was not possible to include the project referred to by the Deputy in the five year construction programme. School building projects currently in architectural planning, including the project referred to by the Deputy, will continue to be advanced incrementally over time within the context of the funding available.

School Staffing

112. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a teaching post (details supplied) in County Kerry will be retained; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57478/12]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The criteria used for the allocation of teaching posts to schools, which is available on the Department website, includes the provision whereby schools experiencing rapid increases in enrolment can apply for additional permanent mainstream posts on developing grounds, using projected enrolment. The staffing schedule also includes an appeals mechanism for schools to submit an appeal under certain criteria, including developing grounds, to an independent Appeal Board. The school referred to by the Deputy submitted an appeal to the Primary Staffing Appeals Board to retain a post allocated on developing grounds which was suppressed in the light of the school's actual valid enrolments at 30 September, 2012.

The decision of the Primary Staffing Appeals Board was that the post could be retained until 31 December, 2012. The school was notified accordingly. The Appeal Board operates independently of the Department and its decision is final.

School Accommodation

113. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding school accommodation (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57479/12]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I wish to confirm that my Department has approved funding to the school referred to by the Deputy to facilitate the construction of the accommodation in question. The school authorities were notified of this decision on the 4th October last.

Student Grant Scheme Delays

114. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding a grant application in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Leitrim; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57566/12]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Officials in my Department have confirmed with Student Universal Support Ireland that on the 5th December, 2012 a request for further documentation was issued to the student referred to by the Deputy. When the requested documentation is returned the student will be notified directly of the outcome.

Question No. 115 withdrawn.

Student Grant Scheme Eligibility

116. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the eligibility criteria and the circumstances in which a person who has made an application for a higher education grant may secure the top-up grant; if in this context, where the person's parent is in receipt of one-parent family payment and also works earning approximately €10,620 per annum and is in receipt of maintenance of cost to €10,000, if such a person may obtain the top-up grant; if maintenance is classified as income for the purpose of assessment of the top-up grant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57603/12]

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. The Deputy will appreciate that in the absence of all of the relevant details that would be contained in an individual's application form and supporting documentation, it would not be possible for me to say whether or not a student should qualify for the special rate of maintenance grant. However, the qualifying criteria for the special rate of maintenance grant in the 2012/13 academic year as specified under the 2012 student grant scheme is as follows: 1. Student must qualify for the standard rate of grant 2. Total reckonable income net of income disregards and Child Dependant Increase must not exceed €22,703 3. As at the 31st December 2011, the reckonable income must include one of the eligible payments listed in Schedule 2 of the scheme.The one parent family payment is an eligible payment for the purpose of qualifying for the special rate of maintenance grant. Maintenance payments are included as reckonable income. The applicant in question should contact their grant awarding authority to confirm the position in relation to their eligibility for the special rate of grant.If the applicant is unhappy with the decision in relation to their grant application he/she may appeal the decision of the grant awarding authority to its appeals officer. 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.

Teachers' Remuneration

117. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason a qualified teacher (details supplied) in County Roscommon, registered with theTeaching Council is paid the unqualified rate for substitute teaching; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57627/12]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The person referred to by the Deputy attained her teaching qualifications outside the State. The Department had not been notified of this teacher's qualifications. This is necessary in order to permit a teacher access to the qualified rate of pay. Now that the Deputy has brought this to my attention, I have asked that steps be taken to do this.

Value for Money Reviews

118. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason for the delay in publishing the value for money report into two teacher schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57635/12]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): A value for money review of small primary school provision is at an advanced stage of preparation. Among the issues the review examines is the location of small schools relative to each other and to other schools of a similar type; account is taken of isolation. I expect to publish the review shortly and I look forward to debating its findings in due course.

School Transport Eligibility

119. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if communities for whom reforms to school transport policy have proven particularly problematic will be afforded an opportunity to propose and implement localised solutions to the problem with the assistance of his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57641/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): The purpose of my Department's School Transport Scheme is, having regard to available resources, to support the transport to and from school of children who reside remote from their nearest school. The terms of the scheme are applied equitably on a national basis. Bus Éireann operates the school transport services on behalf of my Department. This is a major logistical operation which involves the planning of over 6,000 bus routes annually to ensure that, as far as possible, eligible children have a reasonable level of service while, at the same time, ensuring that school transport vehicles are fully utilised in an efficient and cost effective manner. Safety of children travelling on the school transport services is of paramount importance to my Department and to Bus Éireann. Children are eligible for school transport if they meet the distance eligibility criterion and are attending their nearest school/education centre as determined by my Department/Bus Éireann, having regard to ethos and language. Children who are not eligible for transport may apply to avail of transport on a concessionary basis. Bus Éireann work closely with local communities and school authorities when introducing, organising and operating annual school transport services; it is not possible to facilitate localised arrangements

outside the terms of the scheme.

Student Grant Scheme Eligibility

120. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Education and Skills in view of the tardiness of payments by the new structure, Student Universal Support Ireland, in respect of determining a person's eligibility for higher education grants, if persons could be paid at least half of the sum due under the said grant, as these grants will not be paid until December/January in respect of moneys, to which they are entitled in November; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57686/12]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): When a students entitlement to a maintenance grant is established for the full academic year 2012/13 and an award has been made, he or she has been or will be paid the appropriate number of instalments, including any instalments due since the commencement of the academic year. SUSI made its first payment to students on the 19th October and is continuing to make payments on a weekly basis to ensure students can get paid their grant as expeditiously as possible, once they have been awarded a grant. This will continue over the holiday period, with payments on the 21st December and 28th December. Those awarded a grant must supply bank account details and confirmation of registration must be received from the institution in order for the grant to be paid.

Clár Tógála Scoileanna

121. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Oideachais agus Scileanna cén dul chun cinn atá déanta maidir le cóiríocht bhuan a chur ar fáil do Ghaelscoil de hÍde ar an Órán Mór, Co. na Gaillimhe, cad é údar na moille leis an togra seo le bliain anuas; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [57708/12]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Cuireadh tionscadal mór caipitil don scoil dá dtagraíonn an Teachta san áireamh sa chlár 5 bliana infheistíochta caipitil a fógraíodh siar sa bhliain, le súil go dtosófaí ar an dtógáil in 2015/2016. Tá fáil an tsuímh don fhoirgneamh nua scoile ag ardchéim agus sa chomhthéacs sin, tá sé i gceist an tionscadal seo a chur ar aghaidh go dtí an pleanáil ailtireachta go gairid.

Clár Tógála Scoileanna

122. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Oideachais agus Scileanna cé mhéad scoil a bhfuil céim 2B den phróiseas tógála críochnaithe acu, idir scoileanna céad leibhéil agus dara leibhéal, agus nach bhfuil san áireamh i bplean tógála cúig bliana na Roinne, cad iad ainmneacha agus cad í uimhir rolla gach scoile acu; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [57710/12]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Tá naoi dtionscadal ann faoi láthair a bhfuil céim den phleanáil ailtireachta críochnaithe acu agus nach bhfuil curtha san áireamh sa chlár tógála chúig bliana. Orthu seo tá 6 Bhunscoil agus 3 Iar-bhunscoil. Féach an tábla leis seo le do thoil. Mar gheall ar éilimh iomaíocha ar bhuiséad caipitil mo Roinne, de bharr an riachtanais le tús éilimh ar an mhaoiniú teoranta a thabhairt do chóiríocht bhreise a sholáthar chun freastal ar na héilimh mhéadaitheacha dhéimeagrafacha, níorbh fhéidir na tionscadail seo a chur san áireamh sa chlár tógála chúig bliana a fógraíodh siar sa bhliain. Cuirfear

ar aghaidh scoileanna nach raibh san áireamh sa chlár tógála chúig bliana, ach a bhí fógartha ar dtús le bheith san áireamh sa chlár tógála, chuig na céimeanna deiridh pleanála le súil go mbeidh maoiniú breise ar fáil do mo Roinn sna blianta amach anseo. Tá na tionscadail dá dtagraíonn an Teachta ar fáil i gcónaí lena bhreithniú do chur ar aghaidh sa chomhthéacs sin.

Tionscadail Tógála Scoile a bhfuil Céim 2(b) den Phleanáil Ailtireachta críochnaithe acu agus nach bhfuil san áireamh sa Chlár Tógála Chúig Bliana (19/12/2012)

School Name	Address	County	Roll Number
Gaelscoil Mhic Amhlaigh	Knocknacarra	Galway	19994G
Sn Sailearna	Indreabhán	Galway	12706J
Holy Family NS	Ballyshannon	Donegal	20150H
Sn Cill Criodain	Ladysbridge	Cork	19351K
St Johns & St Pauls NS	Rathmullan	Louth	19479N & 19678T
Scoil Iosagain	Farranree	Cork	18786R
St Patricks Cathedral Grammar School	St Patrick's Close	Dublin	60660I
Holy Rosary College	Mountbellew	Galway	63090I
St Raphael's College	Loughrea	Galway	60370C

Clár Tógála Scoileanna

123. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Oideachais agus Scileanna cé mhéad scoil atá ar chéim 2B den phróiseas tógála, idir scoileanna céad leibhéil agus dara leibhéal, agus nach bhfuil san áireamh i bplean tógála na Roinne, cad iad ainmneacha agus cad í uimhir rolla gach scoile acu; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [57711/12]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Tá 29 tionscadal atá ar céim 2(b) den phleanáil ailtireachta faoi láthair nach bhfuil san áireamh sa chlár tógála chúig bliana. Tá 21 Bunscoil agus 8 Iar-bhunscoil ina measc seo. Tá sonraí faoi na tionscadail seo san áireamh sa tábla leis seo.

Mar gheall ar éilimh iomaíocha ar bhuiséad caipitil mo Roinne, de bharr an riachtanais le tús éilimh ar an mhaoiniú teoranta a thabhairt do chóiríocht bhreise a sholáthar chun freastal ar na héilimh mhéadaitheacha dhéimeagrafacha, níorbh fhéidir na tionscadail seo a chur san áireamh sa chlár tógála chúig bliana a fógraíodh siar sa bhliain. Cuirfear scoileanna nach raibh san áireamh sa chlár tógála chúig bliana, ach a bhí fógartha le bheith san áireamh ar dtús sa chlár tógála, ar aghaidh chuig na céimeanna deiridh pleanála le súil go bhféadfadh maoiniú breise a bheith ar fáil do mo Roinn sna blianta amach anseo. Tá na tionscadail ar fáil i gcónaí lena mbreithniú do chur ar aghaidh sa chomhthéacs sin.

Tionscadail Tógála Scoileanna atá faoi láthair ag Céim 2(b) den Phleanáil Ailtireachta agus nach bhfuil san áireamh sa Chlár Tógála Chúig Bliana (19/12/2012)

County	School Name	Address	Roll Number
Carlow	St Mary's NS	Bagenalstown	11135K
Cavan	Virginia Mixed NS	Virginia	16083T
Cork County	Sn Mhuire,	Glenville	17848I
Cork County	Scoil An Athar Tadhg	Carrignavar	19415K

County	School Name	Address	Roll Number
Dublin	Howth Road NS,	Clontarf	13815T
Dublin Belgard	Scoil Mhuire	Lucan	13447Q
Dublin Belgard	Sancta Maria College	Rathfarnham	60341P
Dublin City	St Marys Central NS.	Donnybrook	19727G
Dublin City	St Laurence O' Tooles Special School	Seville Place	19819L
Dublin Fingal	St Oliver Plunkett	Malahide	17914S
Dublin Fingal	Castleknock Community College	Castleknock	76062B
Galway	Scoil Naomh Mhuire	Maree	18089S
Galway County	Scoil an Chroí Naofa	Ballinasloe	20042E
Galway County	Scoil Phobail Clifden	Clifden	91412M
Kildare	St Laurences NS	Crookstown	09414C
Limerick County	Scoil Mocheallóg	Killmallock	20193C
Louth	S N Tigh an Uibhir	Tenure	18635T
Mayo	SN Muine Chonallain	Ballina	13667H
Meath	S N Naomh Pádraig	Baconstown	02905J
Meath	Boyne Community School	Trim	91508C
Monaghan	Ardscoil Lorgan	Castleblayney	72190N
Roscommon	Cloonakilla NS	Bealnamulla	18395C
Tipperary	Sacred Heart Primary School,	Roscrea	18435L
Tipperary	Our Lady's Secondary School	Templemore	65440T
Westmeath	Odhran Naofa NS	Mullingar	17932U
Wexford	SN Mhuire	Barnstown	17913Q
Wexford	St Aidans Parish School	Enniscorthy	20003R
Wexford	Cólaiste Abbain	Enniscorthy	71600B
Wicklow	St Brendan's College	Bray	61790D

Clár Tógála Scoileanna

124. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Oideachais agus Scileanna cad é an staid reatha maidir leis an iarratas ó Scoil Shailearna ar airgead le síneadh a chur leis an scoil; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [57712/12]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Tá an tionscadal tógála don scoil dá dtagraíonn an Teachta ag ardchéim phleanáil ailtireachta faoi láthair. Thug mo Roinnse faomhadh d'aighneacht Chéim 2b (Dearadh Mionsonraithe) le déanaí. Mar gheall ar éilimh iomaíocha ar bhuiséad caipitil mo Roinne, de bharr an riachtanais le tús éilimh ar an mhaoiniú teoranta a thabhairt do chóiríocht bhreise a sholáthar chun freastal ar na héilimh mhéadaitheacha dhéimeagrafacha, níorbh fhéidir an tionscadal seo a chur san áireamh sa chlár tógála chúig bliana a fógraíodh siar sa bhliain. Cuirfear ar aghaidh scoileanna nach raibh san áireamh sa chlár tógála chúig bliana, ach a bhí fógartha ar dtús le bheith san áireamh sa chlár tógála, chuig na céimeanna deiridh pleanála le súil go mbeidh maoiniú breise ar fáil do mo Roinn sna blianta amach anseo. Tá an tionscadal dá dtagraíonn an Teachta ar fáil i gcónaí lena bhreithniú do chur ar aghaidh sa chomhthéacs sin.

National Procurement Service Framework Agreements

125. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he has any concerns regarding the effect on local small indigenous businesses as a result of circulars issuing from his Department in relation to the purchase of consumables such as stationary which state that from April 2013 it will be mandatory to purchase these from one named supplier thus depriving local businesses of a very important source of business; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57726/12]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The Government's Public Service Reform Plan recognises the key strategic importance of public procurement and provides for the development of a new policy framework for procurement. The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform notified Departments and public bodies of the mandatory requirement to use central contracts, put in place by the National Procurement Service (NPS), when procuring a range of commonly acquired goods and services. The current arrangements are set out in circular 6/12 Public Procurement (Framework Agreements). These national contracts are targeted at securing best value for money and facilitating Departments and agencies to deliver services within their budgetary constraints. Within the Education Sector, the mandatory arrangement relating to stationery currently applies to the Higher Education and VEC Sectors. I understand that the NPS are working on a new contract for stationery which will be in place from April 2013. My Department is currently working on a procurement circular for schools and the content of this will be the subject of discussion with the NPS and the school management bodies early in the school year. The NPS is supporting Small and Medium Business Enterprises (SMEs) through its education and guidance strategies and many Irish SMEs have been successful in winning NPS frameworks in areas such as stationery, managed print services and ICT consumables. These SMEs may, in turn, source many of their services and products from local manufacturers and agents.

Teachers' Remuneration

126. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the new payment scale for new primary school teachers agreed with the social partners of €30,702 will come into effect; the reason for the delay in implementing this arrangement; whether arrears are now owing to teachers who will benefit from this pay scale and if so when will these arrears be paid; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57748/12]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The most significant adjustment to teacher pay arising from the recent Government decision on allowances is that new entrant teachers will not receive qualification allowances but will start on a new salary scale, the first point of which is equivalent to the fourth point of the existing scale. This new salary scale will apply in the case of all teachers who are new appointees to teaching on or after 1 February 2012. The introduction of this new salary scale has been a complex task which has required a detailed implementation process. A circular, setting out the new salary scale is due to issue shortly from my Department. It is intended that the process of migrating all teachers who were appointed on or after 1 February 2012 over to the new salary scale will commence following publication of the circular and any arrears of salary due to these teachers will be paid to them as soon as possible.

EU Programmes

127. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the progress made to date in relation to the establishment of a successor programme to the Peace III Programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57599/12]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): Discussions on new EU programmes and funding are ongoing in the context of the negotiation of the Multi-annual Financial Framework 2014-2020. Proposals for a new Peace IV Programme are being actively considered as part of this process. However the outcome will not be know until the Multiannual Financial Framework 2014 -2020 has been finalised by the European Council.

Health Services Reform

128. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will provide the underlying workings in support of the €70 million reduced professional fees in the Department of Health 2013 budget; and if he will set out the way such savings estimates were validated by his Department. [57393/12]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): I refer the Deputy to the Minister for Heath who has responsibility for achieving the €70m savings target set by Government in the estimates by way of a reduction in professional fees.

It is matter for the Minister for Health to determine by regulation the appropriate level of reduction in professional fees for the different health professionals having regard to the state of the public finances and the other factors set out in Section 9 of the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2009 following a 30 day consultation process with the relevant interests.

Capital Programme Expenditure

129. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the consideration that will be paid to employment when the capital budget for 2013 is profiled by month; if he will consider measures to accelerate capital spending when appropriate in order to promote and prioritise employment. [57394/12]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The monthly profiling of capital expenditure is carried out by individual Departments on the basis of the likely timing of payments related to capital projects and programmes which they deliver within their annual capital allocation. Job creation is not a factor of the profiling exercise. Queries in relation to the profiling of capital allocations are a matter for individual Ministers and their Departments.

While my Department is not responsible for the profiling of capital expenditure it does set the overall expenditure allocations of Departments which includes setting the five year multi-annual capital envelopes. Following a Government-wide review of the public capital programme, the five year envelope out to 2016 was set in November last year; this was slightly adjusted in Budget 2013 to address pressures relating to contractual commitments, drawdown of EU funding, replacement of Garda vehicles and to allow for the progression of a new children's detention facility at Oberstown.

There will, of course, be direct employment benefits in the delivery of the infrastructure proposed in the Investment Framework and most importantly from the contribution that this capital investment makes to providing the capacity for the economy to grow. In this context, supports to the enterprise sector through agencies such as Enterprise Ireland and the IDA were protected in the review of the Public Capital Programme. The unprecedented level of investment over the past few years delivered through the Enterprise Development Agencies helps to foster sustainable and valuable employment in the exporting sectors of the economy which will be critical to recovery.

Departmental Appointments

130. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the process involved in the appointment of a person (details supplied) as legal adviser to the Government reform unit and statute law revision programme director of his Department; the nature of the financial arrangement with this adviser, including costs per hour or per day; if he will provide in tabular form, the amounts invoiced by this advisor in 2011 and to date in 2012, and the topic or issues covered in the advice provided for each invoice; if a procurement process took place, and if so, the criteria used; the weightings that were attached to these criteria; the number of tenders, proposals or quotations that were received; the number of tenders, proposals or quotations that were scored and the range of prices or costs quoted by tenderers. [57532/12]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): Following the identification by officials of the requirement for professional legal expertise to support the delivery of the legislative programme being delivered by the Government Reform Unit in my Department, a person was appointed on 26 March 2012 following an open procurement advertised publicly on e-tenders to act as adviser and as Director of the Statute Law Revision Programme reporting to the Head of the Unit.

Three tenders were received in response to the RFT with hourly rates ranging from €111 to €350 and these were all evaluated by my Department on the basis of the criteria and weightings set out in the table following:

Criteria	Weighting
Expertise, skills, qualifications and experience of the Tenderer	25
Experience of the Tenderer in providing similar services to those set out in this RFT	15
The ability of the Tenderer to demonstrate a clear understanding of the objectives of the Government Reform Unit, and how the Tenderer would expect to contribute to the delivery of the work of the Unit	25
Completeness, Quality and Credibility of Response	10
Costs and price	25

The contractual arrangement is based on a cost of €111.00 per hour plus VAT for a maximum period 15 hours per week. The duration of the contract is 18 months. The amounts paid on invoices for 2012 are detailed in the table below along with the topics covered in the advice provided:

Invoice Date	Amount Invoiced Incl. VAT	Topics/Issues Covered
	€	
March/April	10,239.75	Oireachtas Inquiries
		Confidential Communications with Members of the Dáil
		Regulation of Lobbying
		Civil Service Accountability
		Statute Law Revision Project
		Mahon Tribunal Recommendation/ Ethics Legislation
		Protected Disclosures in the Public Interest Legislation
		Freedom of Information Legislation
		Ombudsman Bill 2008
April / May	10,239.75	Oireachtas Inquiries
		Confidential Communications with Members of the Dáil
		Regulation of Lobbying
		Civil Service Accountability
		Statute Law Revision Project
		Mahon Tribunal Recommendation / Ethics Legislation
		Protected Disclosures in the Public Interest Legislation
		Freedom of Information Legislation
		Ombudsman Bill 2008
June / July 1st	8,191.80	Oireachtas Inquiries
		Confidential Communications with Members of the Dáil
		Regulation of Lobbying
		Civil Service Accountability
		Statute Law Revision Project
		Mahon Tribunal Recommendation/Ethics Legislation

Invoice Date	Amount Invoiced Incl. VAT	Topics/Issues Covered
		Protected Disclosures in the Public Interest Legislation
		Freedom of Information Legislation
		Ombudsman Bill 2008
July 2nd-31st	8,191.80	Oireachtas Inquiries
		Confidential Communications with Members of the Dáil
		Regulation of Lobbying
		Civil Service Accountability
		Statute Law Revision Project
		Mahon Tribunal Recommendation/Ethics Legislation
		Protected Disclosures in the Public Interest Legislation
		Freedom of Information Legislation
		Ombudsman Bill 2008
August	6,143.85	Statute Law Revision Project
		Protected Disclosures in the Public Interest Legislation
		Freedom of Information Legislation
September	8,191.80	Oireachtas Inquiries
		Confidential Communications with Members of the Dáil
		Statute Law Revision Project
		Ombudsman Bill 2008
October	6,143.85	Oireachtas Inquiries
		Regulation of Lobbying
		Statute Law Revision Project
		Freedom of Information Legislation
		Ombudsman Bill 2008
November	8,191.80	Oireachtas Inquiries
		Regulation of Lobbying
		Statute Law Revision Project
		Mahon Tribunal Recommendation/ Ethics Legislation

Invoice Date	Amount Invoiced Incl. VAT	Topics/Issues Covered
		Protected Disclosures in the Public Interest Legislation
		Freedom of Information Legislation
		Ombudsman Bill 2008

Public Sector Pay

131. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform to show separately, the amount of money that would be saved if all increments across the public service were suspended in 2013; if all increments in respect of persons earning a basic salary of over €60,000 per annum were suspended in 2013; if all increments in respect of persons earning a basic salary of over €75,000 per annum were suspended in 2013; if all increments in respect of persons earning a basic salary of over €90,000 per annum were suspended in 2013; if all increments in respect of persons earning a basic salary of over €100,000 per annum were suspended in 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57612/12]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): My Department has access to detailed data on increments only in the Civil Service sector, for which I have direct responsibility.

On increments generally, based on updated information submitted to my Department on the total cost of increments in a full year in the various sectors, the full year cost of increments in the public service (excluding the Local Authority sector) is now estimated at some €150 million per annum and less than half that sum in 2013. Significantly reduced recruitment, the ongoing substantial fall in numbers of public servants and higher numbers reaching the maxima of scales has reduced the cost of increments. This cost will continue to fall over the coming years.

Data available in relation to increments payable in the Civil Service illustrates the significant reduction in the estimated cost of increments from €23m in 2009 to €16.5m in 2013. It also shows the reduction in the number of employees paid increments on an annual basis from 43% in 2009 to 36% in 2013 of a reducing staff cohort. This reduction arises due to recruitment restrictions and as more people reach the maxima of the scales. This reduction in cost is accentuated as new recruits to the public service are subject also to a 10% reduction in their pay scales with effect from 1 January 2011.

Of the estimated total annual cost for payment of increments in the Civil Service in 2013, the estimated amount that would not be paid were increments suspended in respect of civil servants due an increment in certain salary bands is as follows:

Salary Band	Amount Saved by Abolition of Increments
Over €60,000 to over €100,000	€3.685m
Over €75,000 to over €100,000	€2.165m
Over €90,000 to over €100,000	€0.925m
Over €100,000	€0.640m

Social Welfare Code Issues

132. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he

has considered the merits of a central State means testing body to facilitate the efficient implementation of fair and progressive social protection, education and health care policy, amongst others; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57694/12]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): I am advised by my colleague, the Minister for Social Protection, Deputy Joan Burton, that the delivery of means tested payments is constantly under review and that there are two important projects currently underway in the Department of Social Protection which will streamline the delivery of means tested payments.

The objective of the first project is to facilitate the capture and storage of means information and the calculation of customer means across social assistance schemes. This application now is in use in four scheme areas and is in the process of being rolled out to further schemes. One of the benefits of this project is that the Department of Social Protection will, where appropriate, be able to re-use means information already held which in turn will provide better customer service by reducing the need for different parts of the Department to request information from the applicant.

The Department of Social Protection is exploring the possibility of sharing means data with other agencies involved in the administration of means tested payments. A 'pilot' exercise was undertaken across quarters 2 and 3 of 2012 with two other agencies to assess the usability of the available data, to devise the technical infrastructure required to support data sharing and to identify other issues to be addressed in order to share data across all agencies. Work on this project will continue in 2013 and will inform any future developments in relation to means testing arrangements across a range of Government bodies.

The second project involves the establishment of Intreo, the new integrated employment and support service provided by the Department of Social Protection. This integrates the former FÁS employment services and community programmes and the former HSE Community Welfare Services (CWS) with the income maintenance role of the Department. This project is transforming social welfare offices into one-stop-shops where clients can access their entitlements and get help with planning their return to work. This means a more coordinated approach to the provision of service to the public and will create opportunities to remove duplication of work, including in the area of means assessment.

The Intreo service will be operational in ten social welfare offices by the end of 2012 and will be rolled out to all areas of the country by end 2014.

Public Sector Allowances Review

133. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will provide details of all allowances to public and civil servants that were abolished this year including details of the estimated savings in 2013 of the elimination of such allowances in each case; whether they apply to existing staff or to new employees only; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57727/12]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): Departments were notified by my Department on 28th September 2012 of details of the Government decision in relation to the outcome of the Review of Public Sector Allowances and Premium Pay. Copies of these letters, detailing allowances to be abolished for new beneficiaries and allowances to be approved for new beneficiaries but subject to review and/or modification are publicly available on my Departments website at www.per.gov.ie . Extensive material relating to the review, in-

cluding a spreadsheet summarising statistics and the outcome of each allowance reviewed are also published on the website.

Approval for payment of an allowance to a new beneficiary pending the outcome of the review was withdrawn from 31st January 2012 and was not restored in the case where the review found that there is no business case for its payment to new beneficiaries. Because of the moratorium and limited recruitment across the public sector, the immediate value of these decisions is estimated at €3.5 million in 2012 rising to €16 million in 2016, arising mainly in the Education sector where there is some recruitment. Additional savings will be achieved as further allowances are abolished or modified.

As part of the next steps of the Allowances Review process, my Department has written to sectoral management instructing them to engage immediately with staff interests with a view to securing their early agreement to the elimination of those Departmental allowances payable to current beneficiaries, where no business case exists to pay those allowances to new beneficiaries, with a list identified for consideration among the allowances they should prioritise for early elimination. In addition, Departments have been asked to identify other allowances, including legacy allowances, for elimination from current beneficiaries. Departments have responded to my Department on the request for prioritisation and are engaging with staff representatives on the issues.

Given the process currently underway, it is not appropriate to identify a specific target for savings in 2013.

Public Sector Staff Increment Payments

134. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he consulted with the Equality Authority as to whether paying new entrants to the public and Civil Service lower wages, salaries and allowances was contrary to employment equality and general equality legislation; if he did, its response to same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57728/12]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The then Minister for Finance Mr. Brian Lenihan announced in Budget 2011 that a 10% reduction would apply to the pay rates of new entrant public servants with effect from 1 January 2011. It would not be normal practice to consult the Equality Authority on an announcement made as part of the Budget nor on matters of public service pay policy. They have not contacted my Department on the matter.

I would note to the Deputy that the State and its bodies must, in the normal course, be in full compliance with all provisions of employment and equality legislation in the development and implementation of policies, including its employment policies, and may be held to account on those before the appropriate tribunals or courts.

Rural Social Scheme Applications

135. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he instructed the Department of Social Protection to carry out a review of the rural social scheme; the result of such a review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57734/12]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): I understand

that my colleague the Minister for Social Protection and her Department are reviewing the range of employment support schemes and will assess the contribution of each programme to that Department's labour market policy framework.

As set out in the recent Expenditure Report 2013, a range of Focused Policy Assessments (FPAs) are currently underway within my Department, and one of these relates to the Rural Social Scheme. This FPA is being carried out by the Central Expenditure Evaluation Unit of my Department and I expect to see a draft early in the New Year.

Focused Policy Assessments are designed to complement the broader range of evaluation tools available within the public service, including Value-for-Money & Policy Reviews, and will assist in maintaining the analytical momentum that was developed during the course of the 2011 Comprehensive Review of Expenditure. Part of the rationale for FPAs is to stimulate, and to a degree to challenge, thinking within the broader system of public administration about current issues in public policy, and as such the findings of FPAs are not intended to reflect necessarily my views as Minister or the position of Department of Public Expenditure & Reform more generally. Final decisions in particular policy areas will be made by Ministers, weighing all of the various inputs to the decision-making process.

The review of the RSS underway is examining a number of core policy evaluation criteria, namely the rationale underpinning the Scheme, the continuing relevance of the objectives of the Scheme, and to a lesser extent, the effectiveness of the Scheme. Upon finalisation, the FPA will be published on my Department's website.

Departmental Functions

136. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the management structure of his Department; the specific responsibilities of the Secretary General, of each assistant secretary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57525/12]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The administrative head of my Department is the Secretary General, who is principally responsible for the implementation of Government policy insofar as it relates to responsibilities relating to jobs, enterprise and innovation. He is also responsible for overseeing the functions and outputs of the various offices within my Department's remit. He also has overall responsibility for effective management of my Department's finances and people resources.

My Department is organised into five Divisions, each headed at senior management level by an Assistant Secretary. Each Assistant Secretary has responsibility for implementation of policy relating to specific functional areas set out as follows.

-Competitiveness and Jobs, which drives the Competitiveness and Jobs Agenda.

-Innovation and Investment which works to promote a competitive, productive enterprise environment which attracts foreign investment, supports indigenous enterprise and encourages export-led growth.

-Commerce, Consumer and Competition which is concerned with delivering an environment for business in which competitiveness, dynamism and productivity flourishes and in which there is consumer and investor confidence.

-Labour Affairs which works to establish and protect employment rights and to provide the policy, legislative and institutional framework within which good industrial relations prosper.

-Corporate Services and **EU Affairs and Trade Policy**. The mission of Corporate Services is to further the development of staff, support structures and systems to assist the Department in achieving its objectives and in implementing a programme of continuous improvement; the mission of EU Affairs and Trade Policy Division is to define, coordinate and develops our position on EU policy matters and our relationship with EU Institutions. It is responsible for the identification, formulation and development of Ireland's international trade policies.

The Secretary General and five Assistant Secretaries along with the CEO of Forfás form the Department's Management Board. The role of the Board is to ensure that the Department is managed as a corporate entity. Decisions on key policy, strategic and management issues are taken collectively by the Board before implementation or submission for consideration at a political level.

Trade Agreements

137. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the discussions he has had to date with the EU Trade Commissioner de Gucht in relation to the EU-Canadian trade negotiations; if he has outlined the need to protect the European beef market in view of the importance of the beef sector to the economy here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57703/12]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): A free trade agreement between the EU and Canada will bring about important economic benefits for both economies and will create additional export opportunities for our entrepreneurs and those doing business with Canada.

Canada is a priority market for Enterprise Ireland's (EI) exporting clients and the agency provides an extensive range of supports to help them win more business there. To promote Irish exporters' drive into the Canadian market and to further develop its potential for our entrepreneurs, I led an important EI trade mission there in early November. During that mission I met with the Canadian Finance Minister, Mr. Jim Flaherty, and raised with him the EU-Canada Free Trade Agreement including its possible impact on the agriculture sector.

Last year Canada bought €1.742 billion from us in goods and services (€1.1 billion in services and €627 million in goods). It is notable that last year our services exports to Canada increased a significant 88%. Already in the first 10 months of the year our merchandise exports to Canada are up by a very significant 24% to €639 million. Last year total trade between Canada and Ireland was €2.2 billion. This clearly shows the importance of trade with Canada to the Irish economy.

Consequently, a trade agreement with Canada will boost trade with one of our closest trading partners and with an economy with whom we also have very close historic and personal connections. Furthermore, a new generation trade agreement with Canada will help stimulate Ireland's trade potential across the Atlantic and into the United States, with positive impacts on employment and economic growth across the economy.

Throughout the negotiations I have consistently emphasised to the EU Commission Ireland's primary objectives in any trade agreement with Canada. These include both offers and requests to Canada in the agriculture sector and especially the beef sector, as well as other important aspects of the talks such as intellectual property, investment, services and public procurement.

I will continue to look for an agreement that is comprehensive and balanced and one that delivers real trade and economic potential for our economy. In this context I recognise the need

to minimise the impact of trade liberalisation and market opening on sensitive areas of the economy and will continue to express our concerns that any agreement respects our broad trade interests and especially those of the agriculture sector.

My officials met with the EU Commission as recently as this week to again emphasise the importance of an EU Canada agreement in stimulating growth and our reservations about any possible impact on the agriculture sector.

National Internship Scheme Numbers

138. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Social Protection her plans to extend the internship programme for current participants from nine months to 18 months; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [57576/12]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): JobBridge, the National Internship Scheme, provides internship opportunities of either 6 or 9 months for unemployed individuals in organisations in the private, public and community voluntary sectors and at present is limited to individuals who are in receipt of certain social welfare payments (Jobseekers Allowance/Jobseekers Benefit/One Parent Family Payment/Disability Allowance) or are signing on for credits for at least 3 of the last 6 months (78 Days).

The JobBridge Scheme has made significant progress to-date since it came into operation on the 1st July 2011. 13,049 internships have commenced to date with 5,612 participants currently on an internship as at 13th December 2012 and over 2,235 opportunities presently advertised on www.JobBridge.ie. The interim evaluation of JobBridge by Indecon International Economic Consultants (published – 5th October 2012) states that 52.3% of JobBridge finishers progressed into employment with either their host organisation or another employer since finishing their internship. These progression rates compare favourably with European averages in this area.

Given that, in the past, some labour market programmes have been seen as having insignificant or even negative impacts on employment probabilities, this suggests JobBridge is an appropriate labour market intervention. Further information on outcomes will be ascertained as a result of the ongoing formal evaluation of JobBridge. It is anticipated that the final Report will be available in the coming weeks. This evaluation will assess the design, delivery and impact of the JobBridge Scheme, it will provide details of the nature of the work experience of the participants; a measurement of the relevance of that experience to the labour market, analysis of age categories and further findings concerning progression into employment. It will also present recommendations on how the Scheme might be improved. It is at this stage that further consideration will be given to amending the terms and conditions of the Scheme including any potential extensions to the duration of an internship. Any such amendments to the scheme will be notified via the website.

Social Insurance Payments

139. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Social Protection the estimated number of workers here who will be affected in 2013 by the removal of the weekly PRSI allowance from full rate and modified rate PRSI contributions. [57620/12]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Where an employee's weekly earnings exceed €352 per week, he or she is liable to pay PRSI at 4% on all income over the weekly PRSI Free Allowance of €127. For civil and public sector employees paying modified

rate contributions (Classes B, C and D), and who pay PRSI at 0.9%, the weekly PRSI-free allowance is €26. With effect from 1 January 2013, these weekly PRSI free Allowances are being abolished.

This estimated number of workers affected by this measure is as follows:

-1,247,560 private sector employments, and

-73,835 civil and public sector employments.

This measure will have no impact on an estimated 574,830 employments with weekly earnings not exceeding €352 as no PRSI is payable**.**

Questions Nos. 140 and 141 withdrawn.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Applications

142. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Minister for Social Protection the position regarding a domiciliary care application in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Limerick [57402/12]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): An application for domiciliary care allowance (DCA) was received on the 30th November 2012. This application has been forwarded to one of the Department's Medical Assessors for their medical opinion. Upon receipt of this opinion, a decision will issue to the customer. It can take up to eight weeks to process an application for DCA.

Disability Allowance Appeals

143. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason a file in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Donegal was requested by the appeals office in August 2012 regarding an appeal for disability allowance has still not been sent from her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [57417/12]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The person concerned applied for disability allowance on 8 November 2011. The application, based upon the evidence provided, was refused on the ground that the person in question was not medically suitable for disability allowance. The person was notified in writing of this decision on 14 March 2012. The person subsequently submitted further medical evidence for review. However, upon review, it was decided that there was no grounds to revise the original decision to refuse disability allowance. The person was notified of this on 17 July 2012.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office advised the department on 24 August 2012 that the person had appealed this decision and had submitted additional medical evidence in support of the appeal. This new medical evidence, along with all the evidence previously furnished, was referred to a medical assessor and is awaiting examination. It is normal procedure for this process to be completed in advance of a submission being prepared for the Social Welfare Appeals Office. Once the medical opinion is received from the medical assessor, a deciding officer will re-examine the case. If the decision to refuse is confirmed all necessary papers will be referred to the Social Welfare Appeals Office for determination.

Money Advice and Budgeting Service Issues

144. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will urgently proceed with opening the proposed Money Advice and Budgeting Service office in Killarney to provide reasonable access on a geographical basis to all of County Kerry to facilitate the growing demand for the Money Advice and Budgeting Service in County Kerry, which currently is being serviced by Tralee Money Advice and Budgeting Service office which is inundated with increased numbers availing of the essential services and assistance it provides. [57456/12]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Money Advice & Budgeting Service (MABS), under the aegis of the Citizens Information Board, has an office in Tralee, which serves all of County Kerry. MABS outreach services are also currently provided in Killarney and Listowel.

Plans to open a shared office for MABS, National Advocacy Service and the Citizens Information Services in Killarney town are at an advanced stage of development and it is anticipated that the services will be fully operational in early February 2013.

Invalidity Pension Appeals

145. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Social Protection the position regarding the review of an appeal for invalidity pension in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Laois; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [57468/12]

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 13th September 2012. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant Departmental papers and comments by or on behalf of the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought. These papers were received in the Social Welfare Appeals Office on 12th December 2012 and the case 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.

Invalidity Pension Appeals

146. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a determination will be made in regard to an appeal for an invalidity pension in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Cork; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [57470/12]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was referred to an Appeals Officer on 9th 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.

Disability Allowance Applications

147. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghaíl** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will expedite an application for disability allowance in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [57472/12]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): An application for disability allowance was received from the person concerned on the 26 October 2012. The application is with a deciding officer for examination and decision. Once decided, the person will be notified directly of the outcome.

Jobseeker's Benefit Applications

148. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Social Protection if her reform plans would make allowances for a situation (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [57494/12]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Social welfare legislation provides that a person must satisfy the conditions of being available for and genuinely seeking work in order to be entitled to jobseeker's benefit. Any person who fails to satisfy these conditions is not entitled to a jobseeker's benefit payment.

Part-time fire-fighters are entitled to a jobseeker's benefit payment in respect of days that they are engaged in fire-fighting or training. They are, however, required to satisfy the statutory conditions for the receipt of a jobseeker's payment of being available for and genuinely seeking work.

In this regard social welfare regulations provide that every claimant shall furnish such certificates, documents, information and evidence as may be required by an officer of the Minister, for the purposes of deciding the claim and in any particular class of case, shall, for the purposes of making any such claim, attend at such office or place as an officer of the Minister may direct. There are no plans to alter these specific provisions.

My Department is currently examining the position of these workers vis-à-vis the jobseeker's schemes and the unusual circumstances of retained fire brigade personnel. As part of this process officials in my Department are also in discussions with their counterparts from the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government concerning this issue. Deliberations in relation to the position of these workers are on-going and final decisions have not been made with regard to potential changes to existing arrangements.

Question No. 149 withdrawn.

Social Welfare Code Review

150. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Social Protection the problems that would be encountered in means testing all social welfare payments; the steps she is taking to overcome these problems and when we may expect a means tested system of payments. [57519/12]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I understand that the Deputy is referring to the extension of means testing to all social welfare payments, including social insurance benefits and pensions. The primary component of the Irish system of social protection is

a social insurance system whereby entitlement to contingency-based benefits is secured largely on the basis of earnings related paid contributions to the Social Insurance Fund (SIF). There is also a subsidiary system of social assistance for those who do not qualify for social insurance payments whereby entitlement for broadly similar contingency-based payments is made on the basis of an assessment of the person's means.

Similar systems exist across the EU, usually with highly comprehensive benefits that are often pay-related. Social insurance systems are generally based on the 'contributory principle' (contributions are directly linked to benefits) and the 'solidarity principle' (low earners 'do better' on an actuarial basis from their contributions), and these two fundamental principles have different weighting across national insurance systems.

The Irish social insurance system is now relatively comprehensive following the extension of coverage over the period 1988 to 1995 to the self-employed, part-time workers and new civil and public servants. In addition, arrangements were put in place to disregard, for pension purposes, periods spent caring or homemaking.

In general, the social insurance system maintains a relationship between labour force status, earnings from work, contributions made and, finally, entitlement to benefits in the event of certain specified contingencies (such as illness, unemployment or old age). People who pay social insurance do so on the basis that they are building up entitlements which are not subject to a means test in the event of their making a claim, for example because of unemployment, illness or retirement. In that respect, social insurance operates in the same manner as other types of insurance, such as home insurance or motor insurance. I consider that an adequately funded social insurance system is an essential pillar of social protection in Ireland and should remain so in light of its social and administrative benefits.

In addition, there are a range of other payments made on a non-means tested basis, such as child benefit, household benefits package and the respite care grant. Budget 2013 did not extend means testing to any of these payments.

Any consideration of means testing all payments made by the Department would have to have regard to a wide range of factors including the significant administrative resources which would be required, the impact it would have on willingness to pay social insurance and the impacts on poverty and existing occupational pension arrangements for employees which in many cases are integrated with the pensions available from the social insurance system.

Child Benefit Payments

151. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will address the anomaly whereby both parents who have legal joint custody of children are not entitled to an equal proportion of child related benefits and that the means testing process, which sees maintenance payments considered an income for the recipient, would consider it an outgoing for the provider; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [57550/12]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Department of Social Protection administers a wide range of payments through which it provides supports to families including those with children. I understand that the main payments in regard to this question include child benefit and qualified child increases to primary social welfare payments.

Child benefit is a universal payment made in respect of the care of children. Reflecting changes to the payment and its precursor (the children's allowance payment) in the 1970s and 1980s, social welfare legislation provides that the payment is normally made to the mother or

step-mother of the qualified child where the child lives with both parents. Similarly, where the child lives with their father but not their mother, payment may be made to the father.

Qualified child increases (QCIs) are paid as supplements to weekly social welfare benefit and assistance payments to reflect the need for greater incomes among benefit-dependent households with dependent children. Therefore, QCI payments do not of themselves constitute a specific social welfare scheme and entitlement to the appropriate primary adult payment must be established in the first instance. To qualify for payment of a QCI, the child in respect of whom the increase is claimed must be considered to be normally resident with the person who is claiming the primary payment. In cases where the parents of a child are living apart, the child is considered normally resident with whom s/he is living. Where the child is resident part of the time with each parent the child is generally considered to be normally resident with the parent with whom the child resides most of the time.

From this it can be seen that the main principle underlying payment arrangements is that of where the normal residence of the child is, rather than formal arrangements around custody. Decisions around the well-being of the children is the priority consideration in the operation of the current payment arrangements and this is reflected in the fact that payment is given to a person with whom the child is normally resident rather than on the basis of formal custody arrangements. Therefore these schemes do not provide for the splitting of the payment between parties in joint custody cases.

If the Deputy wishes to have a particular case considered in further detail and whether an anomalous situation exists, he can arrange to have the details brought to the attention of my Department for consideration.

Invalidity Pension Appeals

152. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will provide an update on an appeal for invalidity pension in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Longford; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [57565/12]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The person concerned is currently in receipt of illness benefit from this Department. Invalidity pension is a payment for people who are permanently incapable of work because of illness or incapacity and who satisfy the contribution conditions.

This department received a claim for invalidity pension for the person concerned on 7 November 2011. The claim was refused by a deciding officer on the ground that the person in question was not deemed to be permanently incapable of work. The applicant was notified of this decision and the reason for it on 15 November 2012.

The person concerned subsequently submitted further medical evidence in support of her claim. This evidence has been forwarded to a different medical assessor for evaluation and a decision will issue to the person concerned once the review is completed.

Family Income Supplement Application Numbers

153. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of applications for family income supplement that were received by her Department before 5 November 2012 that are not yet processed; the timescale for concluding these cases; and if she will make

a statement on the matter. [57595/12]

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.

FIS claims, both new and renewal, received on or after the 5th November 2012 are currently being processed on receipt. On 2 November 2012 there were 7,390 (approx.) new FIS applications and 7,810 (approx.) renewal applications awaiting approval. There are 7,370 (approx.) new FIS applications and 4,290 (approx.) renewal applications currently awaiting approval.

An in-depth Business Process Improvement (BPI) project has recently been completed for the FIS scheme. This project focused on optimising output, improving customer service and the elimination of backlogs.

The outcome of this review is a detailed plan outlining the process required to manage both the continuous weekly intake and backlog claims clearance. This plan sees the current weekly new claim and renewal intake processed by one team, while the backlog is ring-fenced and a focused team assigned to this work with a clear plan for its elimination.

The team including additional temporary resources has been identified and is already assigned and working on the backlog claims. In order to reduce the time it will take to eliminate the backlog, some claims are being processed outside of Longford Social Welfare Services Office. This team is fully focused on the elimination of the backlog of claims in the shortest possible timeframe, concentrating in the first instance on those claims which were previously in payment but where payment has expired and continuing on to first-time new claims. Within those categories, those waiting the longest will be processed first.

It is expected that the backlog will be fully eliminated by the end of March 2013. Claims which are approved by the backlog team will be backdated to the date of claim or the date of expiry of the previous claim, as appropriate, and all arrears due will be paid.

Question No. 154 withdrawn.

National Internship Scheme Numbers

155. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath was classified as an adult dependant, but who in fact could have afforded a social welfare payment in their own right is not allowed to participate under the jobbridge initiative; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [57604/12]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The eligibility to access the National Internship Scheme is based on the overall Labour Market policy objective of ensuring a pathway to appropriate employment, training and education opportunities. The policy objective is to prioritise scarce resources to those in receipt of specified payments or who are on the Live Register so as to increase their chances of leaving it, thereby ensuring a reduction in Exchequer costs over time.

In pursuit of this objective, it has been decided that eligibility for the scheme should be targeted at those in receipt of a qualifying claim (Jobseekers Allowance/Jobseekers Benefit/One Parent Family Payment/Disability Allowance /Signing for Credits) for 78 days out of the last 6

months. Time spent of certain other government-sponsored training may also be taken into account when calculating eligibility. The Department is not in a position to make any exceptions to these requirements.

I wish to advise the Deputy that the person concerned has never made a claim for a Job Seeker's payment. The person concerned was classified as an adult dependant by virtue of the fact that their partner made the claim for JobSeeker's Allowance and applied for an increase in his payment in respect of them as his adult dependant. It is open to the person concerned to submit a claim for a Jobseeker's payment/ sign for credits in her own right, which, if allowed, would entitle her for application to the JobBridge Scheme, once she has a live claim for the requisite number of days as outlined above.

Carer's Allowance Applications

156. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Minister for Social Protection the position regarding carer's allowance in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Limerick. [57640/12]

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 9th March 2012. The application is with a deciding officer for a decision. Once processed, the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

Back to Education Allowance Appeals

157. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if arrears in respect of back to education or one parent family allowance is warranted for the period February to October 2012 in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [57666/12]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): A review of this case will be undertaken and the person concerned will be informed of the outcome on completion of the review.

Disability Allowance Eligibility

158. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the extent to which entitlement to partial sick benefit is likely to be affected after 9 January 2013 when entitlement expires in the case a person (details supplied) in County Laois; if they will have an entitlement to disability allowance in view of the fact that their spouse is unemployed and in receipt of unemployment benefit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [57667/12]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The person concerned made an application for partial capacity benefit on 1st October 2012. They will be notified of the decision of this application on 21st December 2012.

Partial capacity benefit is a social welfare scheme which allows a person with a reduced capacity to work to return to work or self-employment, and continue to receive a payment from the Department of Social Protection.

To qualify for partial capacity benefit a person must be currently in receipt of either illness benefit (for a minimum of 6 months) or invalidity pension .

An applicant for partial capacity benefit may not commence employment until they have received written approval to do so from the Department of Social Protection.

A claimant for partial capacity benefit will continue to have an entitlement to this payment for as long as an entitlement to illness benefit exists. When partial capacity benefit exhausts, the person concerned may apply for disability allowance. Applicants for disability allowance must satisfy the medical eligibility requirements of that scheme and are subject to a means test. Partial capacity benefit is not available to persons in receipt of disability allowance.

Rent Supplement Scheme Applications

159. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the level of rent allowance payable in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [57668/12]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The person concerned was sent a request for further information on the 18th September 2012 in relation to a matter that was brought to our attention by the landlord. The rent supplement claim remains suspended until this information has been supplied.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Applications

160. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Social Protection if a domiciliary care allowance will be approved in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny as a matter of urgency. [57674/12]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I am advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that an oral hearing of the appeal of the person concerned took place on 17th December 2012 and the Appeals Officer is now considering the appeal in the light of all the evidence submitted, including that adduced at the hearing. The person concerned will be notified of the Appeals Officer decision when the appeal has been determined.

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

Disability Allowance Appeals

161. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will expedite an application for a social welfare appeal hearing of the refusal of an application for disability allowance in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [57687/12]

163. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will expedite an application for a social welfare appeal of a refusal of an application for disability allowance in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath [57689/12]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 161 and 163 together.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on 3rd October 2012. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant Departmental papers and comments by or on behalf of the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought. These papers were received in the Social Welfare Appeals Office on 17th December 2012 and the case 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

162. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will expedite an application for a social welfare appeal hearing of the refusal of an application for carer's allowance in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [57688/12]

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 3rd October 2012. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant Departmental papers and comments by or on behalf of the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought. These papers were received in the Social Welfare Appeals Office on 7th December 2012 and the case 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. 163 answered with Question No. 161.

Rural Social Scheme Applications

164. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of participants on the rural social scheme broken down on an integrated company basis; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [57735/12]

165. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of participants on the rural social scheme broken down by county; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [57743/12]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 164 and 165 together.

The rural social scheme currently provides work opportunities for around 2,600 participants and 130 supervisory staff. Overall responsibility for the RSS rests with the Department of Social Protection with responsibility for its day-to-day operations resting with 35 local development companies and Údarás na Gaeltachta which is responsible for delivery in Gaeltacht areas, collectively referred to as Implementing Bodies. €45m has provisionally been allocated for 2013, which will allow the scheme to continue along the same lines in 2013 as in previous years

but does not allow for the recruitment above the numbers stated above.

The tables outline the breakdown of participants by Implementing Body and on a county basis.

Table 1 - Allocation of RSS Placements

Implementing Body	County	Participant Quota	Supervisor Quota
Breffni Integrated Limited	Cavan	80	4
Carlow County Development Partnership Ltd.	Carlow	18	1
Clare Local Development Co. Ltd.	Clare	117	6
Avondhu/Blackwater Partnership Ltd.	Cork	17	1
South and East Cork Area Development	Cork	8	1
West Cork Development Partnership Ltd.	Cork	68	3
Ballyhoura Development Limited	Cork/Limerick	47	2
IRD Duhallow Ltd.	Cork/Limerick/Kerry	58	3
Donegal Local Development Company Ltd	Donegal	76	4
Inishowen Development Partnership	Donegal	30	2
Comhar na nOileán Teoranta	Islands	20	0
FORUM Connemara Ltd.	Galway	14	1
Galway Rural Development Co. Ltd.	Galway	156	8
North and East Kerry LEADER Partnership Teoranta	Kerry	89	5
South Kerry Development Partnership Ltd.	Kerry	138	7
Cill Dara ar Aghaidh Teoranta	Kildare	22	1
County Kilkenny LEADER Partnership Co. Limited	Kilkenny	19	1
Laois Community and Enterprise Dev. Co. Ltd.	Laois	25	1
Leitrim Integrated Development Company Ltd.	Leitrim	100	5
West Limerick Resources	Limerick	36	2
Longford Community Resources	Longford	55	3
Louth LEADER Partnership	Louth	10	0
Mayo North East LEADER Partnership Co. Teo.	Mayo	221	11
South West Mayo Development Company Ltd.	Mayo	191	10
Meath Community Rural & Social Dev. Partnership	Meath	16	1

Implementing Body	County	Participant Quota	Supervisor Quota
Monaghan Integrated Development Limited	Monaghan	40	2
Offaly Integrated Local Development Company Ltd.	Offaly	52	3
Roscommon Integrated Development Company Ltd.	Roscommon	149	7
County Sligo LEADER Partnership Co. Ltd.	Sligo	124	6
North Tipperary LEADER Partnership	Tipperary	37	2
South Tipperary Development Company Limited	Tipperary	26	1
Waterford LEADER Partnership Ltd.	Waterford	12	0
Westmeath Community Development Ltd.	Westmeath	33	2
Wexford Local Development	Wexford	39	2
Co. Wicklow Community Partnership	Wicklow	20	1
Údarás na Gaeltachta	Mayo/Kerry/Galway/ Donegal	437	21
Totals		2,600	130

Table 2 - Participants per County as at 18th December 2012

County	-
Co. Carlow	18
Co. Cavan	83
Co. Clare	115
Co. Cork	170
Co. Donegal	228
Co. Galway	281
Co. Kerry	280
Co. Kildare	23
Co. Kilkenny	18
Co. Laois	20
Co. Leitrim	98
Co. Limerick	76
Co. Longford	53
Co. Louth	11
Co. Mayo	566
Co. Meath	14
Co. Monaghan	42
Co. Offaly	45
Co. Roscommon	149
Co. Sligo	129

County	-
Co. Tipperary	65
Co. Waterford	12
Co. Westmeath	36
Co. Wexford	41
Co. Wicklow	18
Totals	2,591

Social Welfare Schemes Administration

166. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of applications on hand, under each social welfare scheme, that have not been decided and were made more than three months ago; the reason for the delay in processing applications; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [57749/12]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Department is committed to ensuring that claims are processed as expeditiously as possible. Processing times vary across schemes, depending on the differing qualification criteria. Schemes that require a high level of documentary evidence from the customer, particularly in the case of illness-related schemes, can take longer to process. Similarly, means-tested payments can also require more detailed investigation and interaction with the applicant, thereby lengthening the decision making process. Delays can also arise if information is required from social security organisations in other jurisdictions and where additional information has been requested from the applicant but remains outstanding. For example, pension claims on hand for more than three months typically occur in the case of EU/bilateral pensions where information from other jurisdictions is awaited or, in the case of self-employed, there may be outstanding PRSI liabilities. This delay also impacts on household benefits in many cases as they are linked to when the pension is awarded.

As part of the Department's programme of service delivery modernisation, a range of initiatives aimed at streamlining the processing of claims, supported by modern technology, have been implemented in recent years. Operational processes, procedures and the organisation of work are continually reviewed to ensure that processing capability is maximised.

In addition, the staffing needs of the Department are regularly reviewed, having regard to workloads and the competing demands arising, to ensure that the best use is made of all available resources. The Department will continue to source available staff to fill critical vacancies by way of redeployment, or transfer from within the Department and other

Government Departments, taking account of the employment control framework (ECF) target, as determined by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

I wish to assure the Deputy that prompt processing of claims remains a priority for me.

Table: Applications pending longer than 3 months:

Scheme	Applications awaiting decision
State Pension (contributory)	1,095
State Pension (transition)	952
State pension (non-contributory)	372
Widow(er)'s and surviving civil partner's pension (contributory)	118

Scheme	Applications awaiting decision
Widow(er)'s and surviving civil partner's pension (non-contributory) pension & one parent family payment (widow)	19
One parent family payment	1,364
Household benefits	1,086
Bereavement grant	649
Invalidity pension	2,255
Family income supplement - new claims	4,965
Family income supplement - renewals	941
Disability Allowance	2,876
Carer's Benefit	20
Carer's Allowance	6,782
Jobseeker's Benefit	643
Jobseeker's Allowance	3,408
Illness Benefit	0
Maternity Benefit	0
Child Benefit (domestic)	0
Child Benefit (EC Regulation)	Not readily available
Domiciliary Care Allowance	89

Social Welfare Schemes Appeals

167. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of appeals on hand in the appeals office for more than three months; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [57750/12]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The number of appeals on hands for more than three months in the Social Welfare Appeals Office at 18th December 2012, is 13,232. A breakdown of the current status of these appeals is given in the Table.

There was a rapid and sustained increase in the number of appeals from 2009 to date which has placed extraordinary pressure on the SWAO. Significant resources and efforts have been put into reducing backlogs and improving processing times for appellants, including the assignment of 15 additional Appeals Officers, retaining retired experienced officers for 18 months ending December 2011, improving business processes and implementing a new operating model.

As a result of these measures, there has been significant increase in the number of appeals finalised from an average of 13,500 in 2009 to 34,027 in 2011 and the processing times have reduced by an overall 10.2 weeks in the nine months of this year. Further improvement is needed and in that regard,

- The Chief Appeals Officer expects to finalise 6,000 more cases in 2013 than in 2012;

- There is a major programme of process redesign and modernisation currently underway in relation to many scheme areas which will reduce backlogs and will also reduce the time taken for the Department to respond to requests from the SWAO for submissions in relation to appeals;

- It is planned to recruit 8 additional Medical Assessors in 2013.

All these measures together will reduce the waiting time for appellants.

However, by its nature and because it is a quasi-judicial process, the processing of appeals takes time even at the best of times and reflects the fact that while every effort is made to deal with appeals as fast as possible this cannot be at the expense of fairness of due process.

Table: Appeals on hands for more than three months

Status	Number
With Social Welfare Appeals Office	5,488
Awaiting response from Line Section	6,006
Awaiting Medical Review and Assessment	1,590
Awaiting Response from Appellant	148
TOTAL	13,232

Environmental Regulations

168. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if he will revisit the issue of restrictions on gorse burning time, taking account of the implementation method in other jurisdictions, with a view to easing the difficulties that the current calendar based system is causing for farmers and also the fire services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57493/12]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan): I am aware of the concerns expressed in relation to the current restrictions on burning gorse and, indeed, I recently met with farmers' representatives in relation to this matter.

Under section 40 of the Wildlife Acts, the cutting, grubbing, burning or destruction by other means of vegetation growing on uncultivated land or in hedges or ditches is prohibited during the nesting and breeding season for birds and wildlife, from 1 March to 31 August. This is subject to certain specific exceptions, but these exceptions - which include the cutting or grubbing of isolated bushes of gorse during the ordinary course of agriculture - do not allow anything done by burning. Hedgerows are an important reservoir of biodiversity and habitat for birds, insects, wild flowers and other wildlife during the summer breeding season. The purpose of these provisions is to protect bird life during the nesting season, to prevent forest fires, and to protect vegetation and wildlife habitats during the months of growth and reproduction.

However, while hedgerows and scrub are important as wildlife habitats, they need to be managed in the interests of both farming and biodiversity. Accordingly, I included a commitment in the National Biodiversity Plan 2011-2016 to review the overall policy in this area. The commitment is to review, in co-operation with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, both hedgerow and scrub regulation with a view to producing guidelines to encourage best practice for hedgerow and scrub management for wildlife.

With regard to the specific issues raised with me by the farmers' representatives, I have asked my officials to consider them and to report to me as soon as possible.

Architectural Heritage

169. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if

his Department or an agency which receives funding from it have funds available towards the restoration and or conservation of unoccupied thatched houses which are used for community, heritage or cultural activities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57557/12]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan): Part IV of the Planning and Development Acts 2000-2011 provides for the protection of architectural heritage. The Act gives primary responsibility to planning authorities to identify and protect architectural heritage, including thatched buildings, by including them on the Record of Protected Structures. Inclusion on the Record of Protected Structures places a duty of care on the owners and occupiers of protected structures and also gives planning authorities powers to deal with development proposals affecting them and to seek to safeguard their future.

A number of State financial supports have enabled the conservation and restoration of thatched structures. In 2012, my Department provided €500,000 in grant-aid assistance through a Structures at Risk Fund administered by local authorities to assist with works to safeguard structures protected under the Planning and Development Acts 2000-2012 including the conservation of two thatched structures. The Heritage Council, which is funded by my Department, grant-aided the restoration of twenty-three thatched structures under their Heritage Management Scheme in 2012.

The Heritage Council, in partnership with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, also administers a grants scheme to REPS 4 participants on the conservation and repair of traditional farm buildings, known as the Traditional Farm Buildings Grant Scheme. Grants are available under this scheme to carry out approved conservation works to the exterior of farm outbuildings including roofs. I understand that, subject to continued availability of funding, a call for applications for the 2013/14 scheme will be issued next year to participants.

The level of funding available in 2013 and future years for these schemes will be subject to the normal Budgetary and Estimates processes. It is hoped that the Structures at Risk Fund will be continued in 2013 but, a s the Deputy can appreciate, the scope for additional funding for the conservation of the built heritage is constrained by the significant reduction in the public finances.

In relation to policy and guidance matters, my Department, with the assistance of an Expert Advisory Committee representing key stakeholders, is currently finalising a review of the operation of Part IV of the Planning and Development Acts 2000-2012. The review will consider the need, in the light of current economic circumstances, to develop alternative ways of supporting the conservation of protected structures, including thatched structures.

In addition, as part of an Architectural Advice Series, my Department plans to publish an advice book on thatching in 2013, which will include further practical advice and guidance on aspects of conserving and restoring thatched structures. The nine previously published booklets in the Architectural Advice Series cover areas such as roof and energy efficiency for traditionally built buildings. The full series is available on my Department's website at www.ahg.gov.ie .

Turbary Rights

170. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the provision made in the 2013 Estimate to purchase bog to facilitate the relocation of turf cutters; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57589/12]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan): Any funding required in 2013 for land purchase or lease, in the context of the relocation of turf cutters to

non-designated bogs, will be provided from within the heritage programme of the Vote of my Department or from within the allocation to my Department from the Environment Fund.

Irish Language Issues

171. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the position in relation to the Irish Language Act; the discussions he has had with the Culture Minister in the Northern Ireland Executive; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57630/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Dinny McGinley): In the context of the Good Friday Agreement and the St. Andrews Agreement, the Government continues to follow developments closely in relation to the proposed Irish Language Act in Northern Ireland, as well as the overall enhancement and protection of the Irish language in that jurisdiction. The Government remains fully committed to the implementation of those agreements, including the provisions relating to the Irish language. All parties to the Good Friday Agreement recognised the importance of respect, understanding and tolerance in relation to linguistic diversity, including in Northern Ireland, the Irish language and the languages of the various ethnic communities, as part of the cultural wealth of the island of Ireland. Under that Agreement, the British government committed to a range of measures to promote the Irish language and to facilitate and encourage its use in public and private life, where there is appropriate demand.

In the St. Andrews Agreement, the British government committed to introducing an Irish Language Act reflecting on the experience of Wales and Ireland and to working with the Northern Ireland Executive to enhance and protect the development of the Irish language. Since the restoration of the devolved institutions on 8 May 2007, the question of an Irish Language Act for Northern Ireland is a devolved matter and is the responsibility of the Northern Ireland Executive. In terms of recent developments, I should mention that my counterpart, the Northern Ireland Minister for Culture, Arts and Leisure, Carál Ní Chuilín, MLA, launched a public consultation process earlier this year on a draft *Strategy for protecting and enhancing the development of the Irish language* in Northern Ireland. This public consultation process ended on 27 November 2012. I understand that the development of such a strategy is a commitment in the Northern Ireland Executive's *Programme for Government 2011-2015*.

Oibreacha Feabhsúcháin do Scoileanna

172. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Ealaíon, Oidhreachta agus Gaeltachta an bhfuil iarratas faighte aige ó Scoil Shailearna, Indreabhán nó ó Chomharchumann Shailearna ar pháirc imeartha a thógáil taobh ó thuaidh den scoil, cén dul chun cinn atá déanta maidir leis an iarratas; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [57713/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Dinny McGinley): Bhí áthas orm a bheith in ann deontas de €161,242 a cheadú do Chomharchumann Shailearna Teo le déanaí i leith raon ábhar agus oibreacha éagsúla. Chomh maith leis sin, cheadaigh mé deontas de €13,957 do Scoil Náisiúnta Sailearna chun páirc spraoi a fhorbairt ar mhaoin na scoile.

Acht na dTeangacha Oifigiúla

173. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Ealaíon, Oidhreachta agus Gaeltachta cén dul chun cinn atá déanta maidir leis an athbhreithniú ar Acht na dTeangacha Oifigiúla, 2003; cén toradh a bhí ar an gcomhairliúchán poiblí faoin Acht; agus cén uair atá sé i gceist bille a fhoilsiú ag éirí as an bpróiseas seo; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [57714/12]

174. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Ealaíon, Oidhreachta agus Gaeltachta cad é líon na bpleananna teanga a aontaíodh le comhlachtaí Stáit i mbliana faoi Acht na dTeangacha Oifigiúla, 2003; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [57715/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Dinny McGinley): I propose to take Questions Nos. 173 and 174 together.

Mar atá ráite agam roimhe seo, tá sé aitheanta nach bhfuil córas na scéimeanna teanga faoi Acht na dTeangacha Oifigiúla gan laigí, agus gur próiseas casta atá ann scéimeanna a aontú agus a dhaingniú. Tá sé tábhachtach a chur san áireamh fosta gur féidir leis an bpróiseas sin a bheith dúshlánach do chomhlachtaí poiblí, go háirithe leis an mbrú ar acmhainní, mar atá i láthair na huaire.

Mar is eol don Teachta, tá athbhreithniú ar chóras na scéimeanna teanga mar chuid den athbhreithniú atá ar siúl faoi láthair ag mo Roinn ar Acht na dTeangacha Oifigiúla. Maidir leis an athbhreithniú sin, tá anailís déanta ar na haighneachtaí go léir a fuarthas faoin bpróiseas comhairliúcháin poiblí. Chomh maith leis sin, tá breithniú ar an gcás do leasú na reachtaíochta ag teacht chun críche agus tá súil agam go mbeidh ar mo chumas moltaí cuí i dtaca leis sin a chur faoi bhráid an Rialtais sar i bhfad.

Tá 9 scéim teanga daingnithe go dáta i mbliana, rud a chiallaíonn go bhfuil 108 céad scéim teanga san iomlán daingnithe ón uair gur tháinig Acht na dTeangacha Oifigiúla i bhfeidhm. Sa bhreis air sin, tá 122 dréachtscéim á n-ullmhú ag comhlachtaí poiblí faoi láthair agus tá plé leanúnach agus gníomhach ar siúl ag oifigigh mo Roinne le comhlachtaí ina dtaobh sin. Tá mé dóchasach go mbeidh toradh dearfach ar an bplé sin agus go mbeidh tuilleadh scéimeanna á ndaingniú agam go luath.

Tá sé tábhachtach a threisiú go bhfanann forálacha gach scéim teanga atá daingnithe i bhfeidhm go dtí go n-aontaítear scéim nua. Tá sonraí maidir leis na scéimeanna uilig atá daingnithe go dáta, mar aon leis na scéimeanna atá a n-ullmhú faoi latháir, ar fáil ar shuíomh gréasáin Oifig an Choimisinéara Teanga, www.coimisineir.ie.

Calafoirt agus Céanna

175. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Ealaíon, Oidhreachta agus Gaeltachta an bhfuil soláthar déanta i meastacháin 2013 maidir le tairiscint a iarraidh chun cé Inis Oírr a fhorbairt; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [57716/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Dinny McGinley): Mar is eol don Teachta, tá an leithdháileadh do mo Roinnse i dtaca le gnóthaí Gaeilge, Gaeltachta agus Oileán foilsithe don bhliain 2013. Beidh soláthar de tuairim is €0.68m ar fáil d'fhorbairtí caipitil ar na hoileáin don bhliain seo chugainn. Is figiúr táscach é seo, faoi réir na Meastachán a bheith foilsithe agus faofa i mí Feabhra 2013. Tuigfidh an Teachta, ar ndóigh, nach leor an soláthar sin le go mbeidh ar chumas mo Roinne cuidiú le Comhairle Contae na Gaillimhe tabhairt faoi mhór-fhorbairt ar an gcé ar Inis Oírr in 2013.

Scéimeanna Tacaíochta Gaeltachta

176. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Ealaíon, Oidhreachta agus Gaeltachta cén soláthar atá déanta i meastacháin 2013 do Scéim na bhFoghlaimeoirí; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [57717/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Dinny McGinley): Mar is eol don Teachta, tá an leithdháileadh do mo Roinnse i dtaca le gnóthaí Gaeilge, Gaeltachta agus Oileán foilsithe don bhliain 2013. Beidh soláthar reatha de tuairim is €6.723m ar fáil don bhliain seo chugainn do na Scéimeanna Tacaíochta Gaeltachta, lena n-áirítear Scéim na bhFoghlaimeoirí Gaeilge. Is figiúr táscach é seo, faoi réir na Meastachán a bheith foilsithe agus faofa i mí Feabhra 2013. Cé go bhfuil laghdú tagtha ar an allúntas ón mbliain seo caite, tá mé ag súil go mbeidh mé in ann na seirbhísí túslíne sna réimsí seo – ar nós na mná tí agus na coláistí Gaeilge – a chosaint oiread agus is féidir.

Airport Development Projects

177. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the progress made to date in providing air terminals at the airstrips on Inisbofin and Cleggan; if it is intended to build these in 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57731/12]

178. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht his policy in relation to the provision of a subsidised air service to Inishbofin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57732/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Dinny McGinley): I propose to take Questions Nos. 177 and 178 together.

My Department has engaged consultants to complete the design and tendering process for the construction of terminals at the airstrips on Inishbofin and at Cleggan. This work is ongoing. No decision has been made in relation to the provision of a subsidised air service for Inishbofin but this matter, and associated issues, remain under consideration by my Department.

Rural Environment Protection Scheme Payments

179. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the reason a person (details supplied) was not entitled to a top up on their REP scheme payment and the interim payment from his Department as they are farming in the Twelve Bens Area of Connemara and have a right to put sheep on the mountain; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57738/12]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan): The top-up on an individual's REP Scheme payment and the Interim Payment from my Department applies to the management of sheep flocks on the Twelve Bens/Garraun Complex and Maumturk Mountains SACs. According to my Department's records, the individual referred to by the Deputy is a cattle only farmer and therefore not entitled to compensation under my Department's scheme.

Warmer Homes Scheme Applications

180. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the position regarding an application to the warmer homes scheme in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57403/12]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) administers the Better Energy Warmer Homes programme. Better Energy: Warmer Homes provides assistance to upgrade privately owned homes built prior to 2006 with energy efficiency measures. Measures provided under the programme include attic insulation, wall insulation, lagging jackets, efficient lighting and energy advice.

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.

Microgeneration Support Scheme

181. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if the micro energy scheme will be continued; and if additional supports will be put in place to encourage the installation of micro generation systems. [57419/12]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): Electric Ireland has been offering a 9c/kwh feed in tariff, on a commercial basis, to domestic microgenerators since February 2009. No other electricity supply company has to date chosen to enter the market and to offer a microgeneration feed-in-tariff on a commercial basis, although the Commission for Energy Regulation invited them to do so. Previously, a joint ESB/Electric Ireland microgeneration support scheme for the domestic sector offering a total of 19c/kwh (comprising €10c/kwh from ESB Networks combined with the 9c/kwh from ESB Customer Supply (now Electric Ireland)) ran for 3 years (February 2009-February 2012) and had a take up of between 500 and 600 installations. In terms of current supports, it is noteworthy that the REFIT scheme operated by my Department does not set lower limits. There are currently some very small hydro plants operating in the scheme, as well as some small landfill gas and anaerobic digestion (AD) plants.

In REFIT 3, covering the biomass sector, the tariff structure is weighted in favour of smaller scale developments, with a higher tariff being offered for AD plants of less than half a megawatt and biomass CHP plants that are less than 1.5MW.

REFIT 3 Tariffs

i. AD CHP (units less than or equal to 500 kWe) 15c per kWh

ii. AD CHP (units of greater than 500 kWe) 13c per kWh

iii. AD (non CHP) (less than or equal to 500 kWe) 11c per kWh

iv. AD (non CHP) (units of greater than 500 kWe) 10c per kWh

v. Biomass CHP (units less than or equal to 1500kWe) 14c per kWh

vi. Biomass CHP (units of greater than 1500kWe) 12c per kWh.

The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) has been asked to provide my Department with analysis of other means through which the microgeneration sector could be supported, apart from through a feed-in-tariff funded from the Public Service Obligation. In 2009 SEAI initiated a pilot microgeneration programme. This involved 42 installations of various microgeneration technologies. A final monitoring report on the performance of the installations and learning from the programme is awaited from SEAI. This will inform future policy development. In view of falling technology costs, the Department has also asked SEAI to update analysis on the costs of varying levels of support for microgeneration technologies, with a view to considering how the sector could be supported going forward.

Better Energy Homes Scheme Inspections

182. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will provide details of the number of inspections that were carried out by Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland in 2012 to ensure compliance with minimum standards for the installation of external wall insulation; the number of the total inspections carried out which failed to meet minimum standards; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57556/12]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) administers the Better Energy Programme. Better Energy: Homes provides financial assistance to private homeowners who wish to improve the energy performance of their homes. Fixed grants are provided towards the cost of a range of measures including attic insulation, wall insulation, heating systems upgrades, solar thermal panels and accompanying Building Energy Rating (BER). From the start of 2012 to the 30 November 2012 the scheme has disbursed over €27million in Exchequer funds and supported the delivery of over 67,000 energy efficiency measures in over 24,000 homes.

In order to ensure that the works delivered under the scheme have been completed to an appropriate standard, a proportion of properties are inspected by suitably qualified personnel, in accordance with published checklists, to ascertain compliance with relevant aspects of the Technical Specification and Code of Practice. The Code of Practice and quality inspections, combined with contractor sanctions and contractor technical bulletins comprise an integrated approach to quality which ensures that measures are implemented to a high standard, where works are not up to standard that defects are remedied and that standards of workmanship among contractors are continuously improving.

Up to mid December 2012, SEAI paid out 5,515 grants to home owners for external wall insulation and almost 1,000 (18%) were inspected by SEAI. Of the external wall insulation works inspected, 80% had zero or minor issues to be rectified. In 20% of cases, the standards achieved were not satisfactory, and the contractors were required to revisit the house and rectify the issue. In cases where the installations do not meet the minimum standards, it is practice that grant payment is withheld until resolution of the issue is confirmed.

Telecommunications Services Provision

183. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will contact the mobile telephone service providers and notify them of the problems with the service in the Castlecove, Caherdaniel and Derrynane areas in south

Kerry; the plans they have to improve this service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57572/12]

185. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources in view of concerns in relation to the poor mobile telephone coverage in parts of the country, if he has outlined to the mobile telecommunications companies the need to invest to provide adequate mobile telecommunications infrastructure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57600/12]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): I propose to take Questions Nos. 183 and 185 together.

The authorisation of telecommunications service providers generally and the award of spectrum licences including the imposition and monitoring of associated quality and coverage requirements for the spectrum rights to provide mobile telephony services are statutory functions of the Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg) under the Communications Regulation Act, 2002 as amended. The provision of mobile phone networks and services is undertaken by telecommunications service providers who operate in a fully liberalised market under licences provided by ComReg. These licences require MNOs to, inter alia, provide a minimum level of national population coverage.

The design of the network is a matter entirely for the operator concerned and operators tend to exceed their minimum coverage requirements for commercial reasons. Given that mobile telephony services are a radio based technology, they are however, affected by several factors, including topography (the surroundings, trees, terrain, buildings etc.) and the capacity of the network (the amount of subscribers on the same base station at a given time). Notwithstanding this, the recently concluded multi-band spectrum auction, has released spectrum, which was previously unavailable for mobile operators and industry has signalled that this should result in enhanced services being rolled out from 2013.

Wind Energy Development

184. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if the Irish wind industry rules can be updated to protect residents from the known nuisance of the low frequency noise as some counties have a limit of 20dB on LFN. [57597/12]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): The existing Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Wind Energy Development (published by the Department of Environment in 2006), state that in general, noise is unlikely to be a significant problem where the distance from the nearest turbine to any noise sensitive property is more than 500 metres. The Guidelines also advise planning authorities to seek evidence that the types of turbines proposed in a particular development will use best current engineering practice in terms of noise creation and suppression and provide quite specific limits in the permissible increases in noise above background noise from wind energy developments in order to protect neighbouring properties.

In order to ensure that Ireland continues to meet its renewable energy targets and at the same time ensure that wind energy does not impact negatively on local communities, the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government - in conjunction with the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources - will undertake a targeted review of certain aspects of the Wind Energy Guidelines 2006. It is not clear at this point that low frequency noise is a particular issue, but as part of the focused review of the guidelines, noise will be one

of the topics examined. It is intended that the Departments would consult fully with a wide range of stakeholders including An Bord Pleanála, the Environmental Protection Agency, industry and community groups, as part of this review process. The focused review is expected to report by end-2013.

Question No. 185 answered with Question No. 183.

Foreshore Licences Applications

186. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the reason there is a discrepancy between the charges for foreshore licences in Kenmare, County Kerry, in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry and other licences granted in Kenmare Bay. [57386/12]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): My Department is taking legal advice on the issues arising in this case. In the circumstances it is not appropriate for me to comment further at this time.

Mortgage to Rent Scheme Funding

187. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the position regarding mortgage to rent scheme in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57376/12]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): On foot of the recommendations of the Keane Report on mortgage arrears, the Government launched a mortgage to rent scheme on a pilot basis in February 2012. This scheme was extended nationally in June 2012, targeting those low income families whose mortgage situation is unsustainable and where there is little or no prospect of a significant change in circumstances in the foreseeable future. The scheme ensures that the family remains in their home, while ownership is transferred to an approved housing body who in turn rent it to the original owners. While my Department has been responsible for devising the scheme, including, *inter alia* , setting the parameters for household eligibility, neither I nor my Department have any function or role in relation to specific cases.

Proposed Legislation

188. **Deputy John Lyons** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the status of the Noise Nuisance Bill; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57434/12]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): The Programme for Government includes a commitment to take further steps to address noise pollution, *inter alia*, through the introduction of fixed payment notices (also known as on-the-spot fines) and provision for mediation procedures between neighbours. The development of new noise legislation by my Department will be considered in the context of this commitment; however, as indicated in the Government Legislation Programme published in September, it is not possible at this time to indicate when the legislation will be published, having regard to other priorities in the area concerned and the broader range of legislative priorities to be progressed across my Department's remit.

Currently, a person experiencing noise nuisance may contact their local authority, which may initiate proceedings on grounds of noise nuisance under the Environmental Protection Agency Act 1992. This Act also provides for any person, or group of persons, to seek an order in the District Court to have noise giving reasonable cause for annoyance abated. The procedures involved have been simplified to allow action to be taken without legal representation. A public information leaflet A Guide to the Noise Regulations, outlining the legal avenues available to persons experiencing noise nuisance, is available on my Department's website: *www.environ.ie.*

Motor Tax Yield

189. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will set out in tabular form the motor tax received in each of the years 2009, 2010, 2011 and to date in 2012, in total and to provide a breakdown of the tax received by band; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57442/12]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): The data requested are set out in the following tables in respect of 2011 and the period to the end of October 2012. A breakdown of the receipts by band for 2009 and 2010 is being compiled and will be forwarded to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Private vehicles taxed on engine capacity - 2011

Engine cc	-	Licensing Period	-	Total
-	Annual	Half-yearly	Quarterly	
-	€ m	€ m	€ m	€ m
not over 1,000	14,728,981	5,010,647	8,356,727	28,096,355
1,101-1,200	12,073,952	5,084,252	9,985,484	27,143,688
1,001-1,100	840,015	344,330	584,969	1,769,314
1,201-1,300	15,487,519	6,730,113	14,340,523	36,558,155
1,301-1,400	64,174,826	28,291,106	55,073,440	147,539,372
1,401-1,500	9,365,211	3,653,220	7,816,039	20,834,470
1,501-1,600	47,717,556	23,021,907	46,689,880	117,429,343
1,601-1,700	1,160,145	588,823	1,311,689	3,060,657
1,701-1,800	25,368,206	9,489,423	22,682,753	57,540,382
1,801-1,900	31,443,442	13,873,287	32,871,420	78,188,149
1,901-2,000	46,296,498	22,712,652	44,502,675	113,511,825
2,001-2,100	172,905	64,444	130,883	368,232
2,101-2,200	8,409,501	3,787,425	6,553,666	18,750,592
2,201-2,300	2,779,446	1,256,157	2,177,440	6,213,043
23,01-2,400	1,801,374	609,307	1,112,351	3,523,032
2,401-2,500	8,832,994	3,676,282	6,955,122	19,464,398
2,501-2,600	896,460	414,548	600,494	1,911,502
2,601-2,700	1,917,024	1,084,292	1,808,919	4,810,235
2,701-2,800	3,000,350	1,188,228	1,407,603	5,596,181
2,801-2,900	172,788	110,824	323,385	606,997
2,901-3,000	12,793,482	4,495,284	6,715,002	24,003,768
3,001 or more	10,036,518	3,398,511	4,546,754	17,981,783

Engine cc	-	Licensing Period	-	Total
Total	319,469,193	138,885,062	276,547,218	734,901,473

Private vehicles taxed on engine capacity – 2012 (to end October)

Engine cc	-	Licensing Period	-	Total
	Annual	Half-yearly	Quarterly	
	€ m	€ m	€ m	€ m
not over 1,000	11,230,154	3,220,745	5,834,964	20,285,863
1,101-1,200	729,199	267,824	512,774	1,509,797
1,001-1,100	9,930,624	4,258,350	9,173,316	23,362,290
1,201-1,300	12,894,974	5,592,030	12,455,771	30,942,775
1,301-1,400	55,720,777	23,493,159	48,853,522	128,067,458
1,401-1,500	8,197,203	3,002,349	7,264,778	18,464,330
1,501-1,600	40,388,831	18,833,465	42,735,374	101,957,670
1,601-1,700	922,957	512,336	1,207,895	2,643,188
1,701-1,800	20,466,893	8,070,719	20,365,807	48,903,419
1,801-1,900	24,435,704	12,389,411	30,715,756	67,540,871
1,901-2,000	37,518,965	18,358,282	40,741,557	96,618,804
2,001-2,100	126,456	53,206	118,734	298,396
2,101-2,200	7,024,988	2,971,276	6,026,606	16,022,870
2,201-2,300	2,324,567	1,014,732	2,086,310	5,425,609
23,01-2,400	1,442,841	512,176	965,213	2,920,230
2,401-2,500	6,617,529	3,308,016	6,038,725	15,964,270
2,501-2,600	699,560	359,384	515,010	1,573,954
2,601-2,700	1,412,391	816,102	1,576,663	3,805,156
2,701-2,800	2,663,956	880,928	1,294,077	4,838,961
2,801-2,900	104,676	53,568	218,250	376,494
2,901-3,000	10,489,855	4,048,203	5,813,667	20,351,725
3,001 or more	8,200,800	2,488,845	3,871,290	14,560,935
Total	263,543,900	114,505,106	248,386,059	626,435,065

Private vehicles taxed on CO2 - 2011

CO2 emissions - grams per km	-	Licensing Period	-	Total
	Annual	Half-yearly	Quarterly	
	€m	€m	€m	€m
A (0 - 120)	14,674,685	798,697	500,711	15,974,093
B (121-140)	19,694,527	1,368,641	1,279,570	22,342,738
C (141-155)	12,688,950	2,353,940	2,270,811	17,313,701
D (156-170)	7,564,514	1,551,688	1,491,216	10,607,418
E (171-190)	4,288,707	914,844	780,429	5,983,980

CO2 emissions - grams per km	-	Licensing Period	-	Total
F (191-225)	2,893,280	654,434	437,498	3,985,212
G (226 & over)	914,210	162,655	110,436	1,187,301
Total	62,718,873	7,804,899	6,870,671	77,394,443

Private vehicles taxed on CO 2 – 2012 (to end October)

CO2 emissions - grams per km	-	Licensing Period	-	Total
	Annual	Half-yearly	Quarterly	
	€ m	€ m	€ m	€ m
A (0 - 120)	16,752,826	1,311,072	868,664	18,932,562
B (121-140)	32,468,724	3,669,365	2,728,188	38,866,277
C (141-155)	14,325,741	2,635,666	2,792,284	19,753,691
D (156-170)	8,279,240	1,746,610	1,786,169	11,812,019
E (171-190)	4,701,164	1,021,113	933,254	6,655,531
F (191-225)	3,208,501	734,848	548,534	4,491,883
G (226 & over)	1,036,276	210,510	133,770	1,380,556
T otal	80,772,472	11,329,184	9,790,863	101,892,519

Goods vehicles - 2011

Unladen weight (kg)	-	Licensing Period	-	Total
	Annual	Half-yearly	Quarterly	
	€ m	€ m	€ m	€ m
not over 3,000	64,426,105	13,244,063	10,075,615	87,745,783
3,001-4,000	1,230,531	213,248	133,190	1,576,969
4,001-5,000	1,263,209	322,942	208,664	1,794,815
5,001-6,000	1,092,544	294,810	203,070	1,590,424
6,001-7,000	830,418	293,788	233,310	1,357,516
7,001-8,000	1,255,710	394,454	390,539	2,040,703
8,001-9,000	1,615,902	693,428	601,418	2,910,748
9,001-10,000	1,575,489	606,273	806,220	2,987,982
10,001-11,000	1,822,218	770,367	1,627,996	4,220,581
11,001-12,000	2,636,063	1,305,594	3,189,258	7,130,915
12,001-13,000	2,540,190	1,448,240	3,152,233	7,140,663
13,001-14,000	2,916,371	1,457,841	2,643,864	7,018,076
14,001-15,000	2,296,929	1,174,719	2,030,469	5,502,117
15,001- 16,000	1,566,768	555,673	917,862	3,040,303
16,001-17,000	955,234	378,335	346,234	1,679,803
17,001-18,000	559,981	150,986	191,100	902,067
18,001-19,000	255,093	73,077	63,116	391,286
19,001-20,000	139,986	37,664	46,813	224,463

Unladen weight (kg)	-	Licensing Period	-	Total
20,001 or more	374,185	127,625	198,120	699,930
Total	89,352,926	23,543,127	27,059,091	139,955,144

Goods vehicles – 2012 (to end October)

Unladen weight (kg)	-	Licensing Period	-	Total
-	Annual	Half-yearly	Quarterly	
-	€m	€m	€m	€m
not over 3,000	54,687,248	11,755,478	9,566,033	76,008,759
3,001-4,000	1,060,169	191,367	128,455	1,379,991
4,001-5,000	1,053,863	296,886	198,729	1,549,478
5,001-6,000	919,188	270,860	208,495	1,398,543
6,001-7,000	717,528	254,415	220,821	1,192,764
7,001-8,000	1,086,598	359,438	364,517	1,810,553
8,001-9,000	1,386,797	548,048	633,087	2,567,932
9,001-10,000	1,331,700	547,773	695,350	2,574,823
10,001-11,000	1,447,477	632,292	1,483,704	3,563,473
11,001-12,000	2,129,208	1,042,040	2,760,674	5,931,922
12,001-13,000	2,099,067	1,304,733	2,901,623	6,305,423
13,001-14,000	2,718,390	1,364,068	2,475,028	6,557,486
14,001-15,000	2,015,652	1,087,509	1,966,590	5,069,751
15,001- 16,000	1,429,820	463,113	890,168	2,783,101
16,001-17,000	945,400	348,845	423,677	1,717,922
17,001-18,000	576,444	111,056	238,442	925,942
18,001-19,000	321,300	53,735	84,700	459,735
19,001-20,000	100,430	25,330	50,271	176,031
20,001 or more	352,821	106,195	219,765	678,781
Total	76,379,100	20,763,181	25,510,129	122,652,410

Miscellaneous vehicles - 2011

Vehicle Type	-	Licensing Period	-	Total
	Annual	Half-yearly	Quarterly	
	€m	€m	€m	€m
Off Road Dumper	6,128	1,700	4,536	12,364
Dumper/Forklift Truck	182,622			182,622
Excavator/Digger	356,639			356,639
Mobile Machine	1,373,456	162,415	88,287	1,624,158
Agricultural Tractor	5,713,888			5,731,888
General Haulage Tractor	251,932	15,754	7,938	275,624
Taxi/Hackney	2,082,615			2,082,615

Vehicle Type	-	Licensing Period	-	Total
Schoolbus	70,095			70,095
Large PSV/Youth/Community Bus	1,713,378	220,124	122,253	2,055,755
Motorcycle	2,605,713			2,605,713
Vintage & Veteran	1,240,930			1,240,930
Motor Caravan	966,925			966,925
Island Vehicle	72,814			72,814
Hearse	75,814			75,814
Total	16,730,737	399,999	223,220	17,353,956

Miscellaneous Vehicles – 2012 (to end October)

Vehicle Type	-	Licensing Period	-	Total
	Annual	Half-yearly	Quarterly	
	€m	€m	€m	€m
Off Road Dumper	9,876	5,928	3,016	18,820
Dumper/Forklift Truck	163,989			163,989
Excavator/Digger	254,433			254,433
Mobile Machine	1,185,146	143,275	100,200	1,428,621
Agricultural Tractor	5,365,645			5,365,645
General Haulage Tractor	218,246	13,244	6,264	237,754
Taxi/Hackney	1,841,138			1,841,138
Schoolbus	63,192			63,192
Large PSV/Youth/Community Bus	1,595,624	182,917	116,812	1,895,353
Motorcycle	2,508,689			2,508,689
Vintage & Veteran	1,259,014			1,259,014
Motor Caravan	837,301			837,301
Island Vehicle	77,502			77,502
Hearse	72,292			72,292
Total	15,452,087	345,364	226,292	16,023,743

Vehicle Licence Arrears Receipts 2011 and 2012 (to end October) by motor tax class

Motor Tax Class	2011	2012 (to end October)
	€m	€m
Private – engine capacity	17,874,617	15,407,884
Private – CO2	1,084,638	1,355,130
Goods	3,438,957	2,751,457
Off Road Dumper	0	164
Dumper/Forklift Truck	5,260	3,785
Excavator/Digger	9,405	5,711

Motor Tax Class	2011	2012 (to end October)
Mobile Machine	40,947	29,190
Agricultural Tractor	150,274	127,298
General Haulage Tractor	5,162	3,565
Taxi/Hackney	33,678	25,260
Schoolbus	832	355
Large PSV/Youth/Community Bus	29,445	24,083
Motorcycles	83,792	74,349
Vintage & Veteran	25,723	25,819
Motor Caravan	19,675	19,551
Island Vehicle	2,333	2,236
Hearse	1,869	1,700
Total	22,806,607	19,857,537

Motor Tax Collection

190. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will allow vehicle tax Budget 2013 increases commencement date to be introduced on 1 January 2013, as it is standard to allow vehicle owners to pre tax vehicles on the rate at start of prior month; if he will allow the rate at start of December and issued throughout December be the charge for new tax discs issued for 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57453/12]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): Increases in motor tax rates were announced in the Budget on 5 December 2012 and approved by Financial Resolution of the Dáil. As with previous rate increases, the new motor tax rates came into force from the following day for vehicle licences with a commencement date of the following month i.e. January 2013 in the case of this Budget.

Water Services Funding

191. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide a breakdown of funding (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57476/12]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): Substantial funding towards local authorities' water conservation programmes is being provided under my Department's Water Services Investment Programme 2010 – 2013. Water mains rehabilitation is a key priority under the Programme which includes the Kerry Watermains Rehabilitation Project valued at €18.79 million. My Department has to date in 2012 provided funding of € 1.26m to Kerry County Council for watermains rehabilitation works throughout the County. The following table sets out in detail the rehabilitation works underway and the funding recouped to date in 2012 to the Council.

Kerry Water Conservation Stage 3

Rehabilitation Works

Project	Amount Recouped
Kerry Water Conservation Stage 3 - Mains Rehabilitation Works - Derry South	€52,603.13
Kerry Water Conservation Stage 3 - Ballygarran West	€99,555.78
Kerry Water Conservation Stage 3 - Mains Rehab Works - Advance Works - Tralee T own Lead Mains Replacement	€17,616.59
Kerry Water Conservation Stage 3 - County Direct Labour	€137,348.52
Kerry Water Conservation Stage 3, Advance Works Countywide	€954,098.72
Total Paid to Date	€1,261,222.74

Air Pollution

192. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the action he is taking to address air pollution from industries here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57529/12]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): Under the National Emission Ceilings (NEC) Directive 2001/81/EC, Ireland was required to reduce emissions of transboundary air pollutants below agreed national ceilings by 2010. The four air pollutants concerned (sulphur dioxide, nitrogen oxides, ammonia and volatile organic compounds) contribute to acidification, eutrophication and ground-level ozone. Revised emission ceilings for 2020 were agreed earlier this year at a Meeting of Parties to the UNECE Gothenburg Protocol. This will be given effect in EU Member States through a revision of the NEC Directive, with a proposal to be published in the second half of 2013. The most recent provisional monitoring results from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), in respect of Quarter 1, 2012 show levels of sulphur dioxide, ammonia and volatile organic compounds are below the 2010 emission ceilings. Emissions of nitrogen oxides, mainly from road traffic, continue to present a challenge. While these emissions have significantly reduced over the period 1990-2010, they remain marginally above the 2010 ceiling. The EPA monitoring data will be finalised shortly.

Reductions in pollutants from industrial sources have been achieved through effective licensing of industrial installations by the EPA. All industrial installations in Ireland are subject to the licensing, monitoring and enforcement requirements of the Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control (IPPC) regime. The activities of companies operating with an IPPC licence are monitored by the EPA to ensure that the terms of their licences are respected, including in relation to emissions. In addition to the requirements of IPPC, the provisions of the Large Combustion Plant Directive (LCPD) 2001/80/EC also apply to combustion plants with a thermal output of 50MW or more. The LCPD aims to reduce acidification, ground-level ozone and particles by controlling emissions of sulphur dioxide (SO2), nitrogen oxides (NOx) and particulate matter (PM) from power stations running on solid, liquid or gaseous fuel.

Ireland developed a National Emissions Reduction Plan (NERP) under Article 4 (6) of the 2001 LCPD, which is a mechanism that allows “existing plants”, as defined in the Directive, to achieve the environmental objectives of the Directive in a cost-effective manner through the installation of abatement at selected qualifying plants. The NERP option was chosen because it provided both an environmentally ambitious and a cost-effective compliance route for Ire-

land. The ESB and other national operators made a commitment to achieve emission limits for SO2 and NOx from existing plants that were significantly more ambitious than the minimum requirements of the LCPD. In the period from 2008 to 2016, emission reductions are 27% more ambitious for SO2 and 46% more ambitious for NOx emissions.

The LCPD has now been recast by the Industrial Emissions Directive 2010/75/EU, in respect of which my Department is currently preparing regulations to achieve transposition into national legislation. As part of the transposition process, my Department is assessing appropriate compliance options for older plants set out under the Directive to ensure that operators continue to commit to ambitious targets that strike the appropriate balance between protection of human health and the environment and cost effectiveness of the abatement solutions.

Rural Development Programme Funding

193. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government in view of the recent findings of the Ombudsman, the position regarding an application made by a group (details supplied) under Axis 3 of the Rural Development Programme (Measure 322 – Village and Countryside Renewal Development); the significance to his Department of the findings of the Ombudsman in this instance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57530/12]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): The Ombudsman's findings in relation to this matter are currently under consideration in my Department. At present , LEADER activities are co-financed by the European Union at a rate of 85% and, accordingly, come within the remit of a strict regulatory regime which requires that each project must be compliant before any funding is awarded. My Department is now considering ways of moving forward on this issue in line with all regulatory requirements.

Property Taxation Application

194. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government in view of the introduction of the new local property tax if he anticipates any changes to the operation and implementation of the rules with the Private Residential Tenancies Board; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57555/12]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The Finance (Local Property Tax) Bill 2012 is currently before the Oireachtas and is a matter for the Minister for Finance. Until such time as the Bill is enacted I cannot comment on the implications, if any, the legislation may have for the Private Resid ential Tenancies Board.

Litter Pollution Fines

195. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the steps he has taken to date to deal with the issue of election posters on foot of his predecessor's election poster consultation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57588/12]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): Section 19 (7) of the Litter Pollution Act 1997, as initially enacted, provided that election

and referendum posters had to be removed within 7 days following the relevant polling date. Through the Electoral Amendment (No. 2) Act 2009, following the consultation process , this provision was amended also to provide for a time limit prior to the polling date, during which election and referendum posters can be displayed. It specifies that election posters may only be erected from the date of the Polling Day Order or 30 days prior to the date of the poll, whichever is the shorter period. The time limit for referendum posters was not restricted to 30 days; such posters may be displayed from the date the Polling Day Order is signed. Any election or referenda posters in place before or after the stipulated timeframe may be subject to an on-the-spot litter fine of €150. The responsibility for enforcement of this legislation is a matter for the relevant local authority. I have no plans to introduce further legislation in this area at this time.

Foreshore Licences Applications

196. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if a foreshore licence will issue to a club (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57607/12]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): I refer to the reply to Question No. 489 of 22 May 2012. As this matter continues to be the subject of court proceedings, it is not appropriate for me to comment further.

Household Charge Collection

197. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the number of properties that have been liable for the household charge in 2012; and the number that have actually paid the charge to date. [57626/12]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): The Local Government Management Agency (LGMA) is administering the household charge system on a shared service/agency basis for all county and city councils. I understand, from data provided by the LGMA , that as of 1 9 December , 2012, a total of 1,100,227 properties had been registered for payment of the household charge , with a further 22,260 registered for waivers. The combined registrations total of 1,122, 487 represents 69.25% of the total estimated 1,620,814 properties liable for the c harge in 2012.

Housing Adaptation Grants Expenditure

198. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will outline the allocations made to Cavan County Council and Monaghan County Council under the housing adaptation grant schemes for older people and people with a disability for each year since 2007; the funding drawn down by each council each year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57638/12]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The Housing Adaptation Grant Schemes are funded by 80% recoupment available from my Department together with a 20% contribution from the resources of the local authority. It is a matter for each local authority to decide on the specific level of funding to be directed to each of the various grant measures, and to manage the opera-

tion of the schemes in their areas from within their allocation.

Details of the combined Exchequer and local authority allocations in respect of Cavan and Monaghan County Councils for the years 2007 to 2012 and the amount recouped to each authority are set out in the following table:

Year	Cavan	-	Monaghan	-
	Allocation	Recoupment	Allocation	Recoupment
2007	€1,666,666	€753,977	€1,494,583	€1,253,446
2008	€1,813,612	€1,568,060	€2,064,606	€1,470,218
2009	€1,204,166	€1,144,682	€1,592,500	€1,202,311
2010	€1,883,664	€1,309,505	€2,090,834	€1,373,164
2011	€1,850,483	€1,176,998	€1,562,500	€1,232,863
2012	€1,312,500	€1,043,501	€1,500,000	€1,199,342

Non-Principal Private Residence Charge Exemptions

199. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if the Non-Principal Private Residents Charge is payable in respect of a person who has a second property where members of their immediate family live; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57677/12]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): The Local Government (Charges) Act 2009, as amended, broadened the revenue base of local authorities by introducing a charge on non-principal private residences. The charge is set at €200 and liability for it falls, in the main, on owners of rental, holiday and vacant properties It is a matter for an owner to determine if he or she has a liability and, if so, to declare that liability and pay the charge. A number of exemptions from the charge are set out in section 4 of the 2009 Act and section 4(6) provides for an exemption from the charge in a situation where a residential property is occupied rent-free as the sole or main residence of a relative of the owner and the sole or main residence of the owner is either on the same property or within two kilometres of it. This provision is partly based on section 466A of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997, which deals with the home carer tax credit.

Furthermore, the definition of "owner" in relation to a residential property under the Act refers to a person (other than a mortgagee not in possession) entitled to receive the rent of the property. There may, however, be situations involving an exclusive right of residence in respect of a relative residing in such a property. In such cases the owner would not be in a position to receive rent and therefore the owner in question would not be liable. In any event, under the Act it is a function of a local authority to collect the Non-Principal Private Residence Charge. Application of the legislation in particular circumstances is a matter for the relevant local authority. I urge all liable persons who are unsure as to whether they are liable to contact their local authority as a matter of urgency.

Rural Development Programme Funding

200. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government when the payment of a grant in respect of an organisation (details supplied) will be approved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57699/12]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): Funding of €314m is available under the Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2007-2013 for allocation to qualifying projects up to the end of 2013. There are 35 Local Action Groups contracted, on my Department's behalf, to deliver the RDP throughout the country and these groups are the principal decision-makers in relation to the allocation of project funding. Such decisions are made in the context of the local development strategy of the individual groups and in line with Departmental operating rules and EU regulations.

A full and detailed assessment of all projects is essential. Currently, the LEADER activities are co-financed by the European Union at a rate of 85% and, accordingly, come within the remit of a strict regulatory regime which requires that each project must be compliant before any funding is awarded by the LEADER companies. In that regard my Department undertakes an eligibility check on all projects prior to award of funding. The eligibility of the project in question has been assessed by the Department and the LEADER Company has been advised accordingly. The final decision regarding the approval of funding for this project is for the Board of Laois Partnership Company.

Community Development Initiatives

201. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if the allocation of all funding to deliver local development programmes such as Leader and LCDP, under the Putting People First proposals will be channelled through the socio-economic committees of the local authorities through annual service level agreements with entities which are members of the SEC; if the local authorities may be contracted to deliver these services as a member of the SEC in place of the existing local development companies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57701/12]

202. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if under the Putting People First Proposals the local authority socio economic committees will be the applicant bodies for the next round of LEADER funding 2014-2020; if he will confirm that the SEC will be the local action body and that the SEC will receive the Leader administration money; if he will further confirm that the SEC will evaluate and approve individual LEADER project applications; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57702/12]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 201 and 202 together.

The Final Report of the Local Government/Local Development Alignment Steering Group, reflected in the Action Programme for Effective Local Government -Putting People First, recommended that Socio-Economic Committees should have responsibility for planning and oversight of local and community programmes , including oversight responsibility for the management and disbursement of local and community development programme funds, the matching of resources to priorities and achievement of value for money. The Report also recommended that Socio-Economic Committees, appropriately structured and working in partnership with the local development companies should be considered as the vehicle through which the LEADER approach is implemented for the 2014-20 round of EU Programmes.

Detailed arrangements regarding programme implementation, funding and administration were not addressed in the Final Alignment Report, but they are now being considered as part of the implementation of the recommendations. I look forward to the participation of key stakeholders in assisting and advising on the implementation of the alignment recommendations as

part of the planned alignment implementation group. I anticipate that implementation will be approached in a way that promotes co-operation, trust and respect between the sectors. Future approaches regarding local development programmes are also significantly dependant on the scale of future programmes, including decisions yet to be taken at EU level. The planned alignment will see local development and local government as lead partners on the Socio-Economic Committees working in partnership with each other, and their communities.

Leader Programmes Funding

203. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if it is intended to transfer allocations by his Department between the different headings under which the Leader programme operates to ensure full spend of the Leader rural development fund in view of the fact that some companies have allocated their full allocation already under certain headings and that there is very little demand under others; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57733/12]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): Such a facility is already in place under the LEADER elements of the Rural Development Programme and has been for some time. This was one of a number of amendments, aimed at assisting expenditure under the Programme, put to the European Commission and approved by them. The amendment to remove specific measure allocations and increase the flexibility for expenditure under the measures that are performing better has been very successful. One of the direct results of this change is a reallocation of €18 million into the Basic Services measure. This amendment, along with a number of other changes, including an increased rate of aid of 75% for those creating and developing enterprises, has resulted in substantially increased project activity which now stands at over €263 million.

Ministerial Appointments

204. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if it is intended to appoint an independent chairperson to Comhairle na Tuaithe; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57742/12]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): Comhairle na Tuaithe (The Countryside Council) which was established in 2004 , continuously supports and oversees the implementation of the National Countryside Recreation Strategy and its associated schemes, programmes and activities. It meets on a regular basis to discuss relevant issues and progress activities. Meetings are chaired by a senior member of the Rural Recreation Section within my Department; I am satisfied with how Comhairle na Tuaithe operates and have no plans to change it.

Landowners' Indemnity Scheme

205. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the progress made to date in providing a state indemnity scheme against claims by recreational users walking on farm land; the reason this has not been introduced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57744/12]

206. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Lo-

cal Government if he will provide details of the proposal from the State Claims Agency for a national indemnity scheme for farmers against claims by recreational users; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57745/12]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 205 and 206 together.

There is an indemnity scheme in place for private landowners whose lands are traversed by trails that are accredited by the National Trails Office of the Irish Sports Council. This scheme is underwritten by Irish Public Bodies Mutual Insurances Ltd.

However, a national indemnity scheme for landowners to further facilitate access to private lands for recreation purposes, rather than specifically for walking, is currently under development through Comhairle na Tuaithe. The Occupiers Liability Act of 1995 already provides significant protection to landowners, but the upfront costs of successfully defending a claim from a recreational user can be significant. In that regard, the proposed indemnity scheme would remove the burden of dealing with insurance companies and engaging legal advisers from any landowner faced with the prospect of a claim arising from injury or damage to the property of a recreational user.

The possibility of introducing a national indemnity scheme for private landowners facilitating access to their lands for recreation purposes is under discussion with the State Claims Agency. There are a number of important issues and technical matters to be addressed as part of this process. In addition, a comprehensive and robust risk assessment model must be developed and subsequent risk management processes identified and put in place. The full scope of the scheme is also under consideration and it will seek to address access to private lands in rural areas only.

Initially, it was envisaged that individual indemnity schemes would be provided to facilitate Mountain Access and other recreational projects in specific areas but due to the administrative and financial costs associated with such a fragmented approach it was determined that this option was not viable. Comhairle na Tuaithe agreed that my Department should investigate, in association with the State Claims Agency, a national indemnity scheme that could be administered in an efficient and cost effective manner. Progress has been made in this regard but some issues still remain to be finalised. I expect that discussions will continue with all stakeholders involved with a view to introducing a national indemnity scheme in 2013.

Alternative Energy Projects

207. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government when he or Minister of State Jan O'Sullivan will meet a community organisation (details supplied) concerned regarding planning policy in relation to wind farms; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57751/12]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): On 13 December I received a request for a meeting from the organisation referred to in the question. I intend to meet with this organisation in the New Year.

House Repossessions

208. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if, arising

from the recent statement issued by the Revenue Commissioners, it is expected that home repossessions referred to are likely to be in respect of the family home; if it is intended to ensure that every effort is made to protect the family home and encourage the lending agencies in this direction; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57652/12]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I must inform the Deputy that I am unaware of any statements issued by the Revenue Commissioners on this particular subject.

The Deputy should be aware that all mortgage contracts contain remedies, such as repossession, that may be exercised by lending institutions in cases of mortgage default. My Department is consulting with the Office of the Attorney General with a view to framing an appropriate legislative response to recent High Court judgments which have created uncertainty in this area of the law. I want to stress that this issue is not about facilitating wide-scale repossessions by banks and other lending institutions. It is, if it becomes necessary, about correcting an unintended consequence of reforming legislation enacted in 2009.

I should add that under section 99 of the Personal Insolvency Bill as passed by both Houses of the Oireachtas on 19 December 2012, a Personal Insolvency Arrangement proposal shall in so far as is reasonably practicable, be formulated in such a way that will not require the debtor to dispose of an interest in or cease to occupy his or her principal private residence. However, this significant protection is necessarily tempered to take into account that the debtor may not wish to continue to occupy the house or where the costs of the debtor continuing to reside therein are disproportionately large.

The Government is aware of the real and significant difficulties some mortgage holders are facing and is committed to advancing appropriate measures to assist those mortgage holders who are experiencing real and genuine difficulty. Apart from insolvency reform, which is a key to addressing the problem, the Government is also implementing the other measures as recommended in the 2011 'Keane Report' (Inter-Departmental Working Group on Mortgage Arrears). These include the implementation of mortgage arrears resolution strategies by lenders as overseen by the Central Bank, the launch of the "mortgage to rent" initiative on a nationwide basis and the provision of an independent mortgage advice framework including an enhanced website www.keepingyourhome.ie. In addition, the Central Bank's Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears remains a key protection and provides that each mortgage lender regulated by the Central Bank must put in place a formal Mortgage Arrears Resolution Process to deal with its mortgage customers who are in arrears (or pre-arrears) and in particular it also provides that such lenders must adopt at least a twelve month moratorium in respect of co-operating mortgage holders before applying to the Courts to commence legal action for repossession of a borrower's primary residence. This protection remains in place.

Joint Policing Committees Establishment

209. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if his attention has been drawn to the fact that although there are three town councils and a county council in County Louth, there are only three regional county JPCs rather than three town JPCs and one country JPC; if he will investigate the reasons for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57409/12]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I refer the Deputy to my reply to him contained in Parliamentary Question No. 487 of 18 December 2012.

Garda Training

210. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the next date for the evidential breath test training day; the number of Gardaí who will take part in the course; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57443/12]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I am informed by the Garda Commissioner that it is proposed to hold further evidential breath test training in late December 2012.

It is envisaged that approximately 20 Garda members will be trained during this training session.

Community Text Alert Systems

211. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to have the Garda community text alert scheme in operation in the Dublin region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57444/12]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I am informed by the Garda authorities that text alert systems may be used by Gardaí, via Community Alert or other such groups, to alert the community in relation to suspicious activity or vehicles in their area, appeal for information, inform the community about road closures or to provide crime prevention advice. The content of the messages sent are vetted locally by An Garda Síochána.

I am advised by the Garda authorities that there are at present two local text alert systems operating in particular areas within the Dublin Metropolitan Region.

An Garda Síochána is currently examining text alert systems to determine whether it is feasible to roll out such systems nationally.

Closed Circuit Television Systems

212. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Garda stations in which the custody area is fitted with CCTV cameras; his plans to increase this number; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57445/12]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I am informed by the Garda authorities that the four Garda stations listed below currently have a fully commissioned and operational internal audio/visual CCTV system installed in public and custody areas.

Station	No. of cameras
Bridewell Prison	31
Store Street	10
Pearse Street	11
Letterkenny	10

Work in relation to the installation of CCTV is currently ongoing in the following stations:

- Irishtown

- Ballymun

- Finglas

- Leixlip

- Navan

- Ronanstown

- Castlerea

- Carrickmacross

It is proposed that further stations will be fitted out with CCTV cameras. This is a programme which will be undertaken in the light of operational requirements and the availability of financial resources.

Garda Training

213. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if all the recommendations in the An Garda Síochána Training and Development Review Group Report 2009 have been fully implemented; if not, when the outstanding recommendations will be implemented; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57446/12]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I am informed by the Garda Commissioner that An Garda Síochána is continuing to implement the recommendations of the report taking into account the changed economic climate and the subsequent impact on the availability of resources.

The terms of reference for the Review of Training and Development were to "examine all training and development in An Garda Síochána for Garda and Civilian personnel and to make recommendations for the future". The project aimed to ensure that people entering the organisation and throughout their career received the highest quality training in line with international best standards delivered in an efficient and cost-effective manner and ensuring value for the training investment.

While a majority of the report's recommendations are either implemented, completed or being progressed, it is not possible to give a precise timetable for full implementation. In particular, some of the recommendations relate to Garda student/probation training, and implementation of any such recommendations will be linked to a resumption of recruitment.

Garda Divisional Headquarters

214. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the timeframe for the development of the new Garda divisional headquarters in north Dublin as announced in the recent stimulus plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57447/12]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The provision of three new Garda Divisional Headquarters for Kevin Street (Dublin), Galway and Wexford was included in the special Government stimulus package announced in July. These projects are to be delivered by means of a Public Private Partnership and discussions are taking place between the relevant agencies regarding the follow-up action to be undertaken in the light of the Government an-

nouncement.

As the arrangements to be put in place for Public Private Partnerships are complex, it is not possible at this stage to indicate when the projects will be completed. However, I can assure the Deputy that they are being treated as a priority.

Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission Issues

215. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will report on Garda Operation Vacuum; the amount of drugs seized to date; the number of persons arrested and charged to date; the number of successful convictions obtained to date; if this operation is still active; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57448/12]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I am informed by the Garda authorities that 'Operation Vacuum' was the policing operational name given to an investigation into the cultivation of cannabis.

This operation led to the seizure of approximately 655 cannabis plants and 2 kilograms of cannabis with an approximate street value at that time of €300,000.

I am further informed that four persons arrested and charged with offences relating to the investigation were all subsequently convicted in the Dublin Circuit Court.

This operation is not active at this time.

Garda Stations Closures

216. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he has received a submission from an organisation (details supplied) in relation to the proposed closure of 100 Garda stations in 2013 in rural areas; his plans to address the concerns regarding the level of policing in rural areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57528/12]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I received correspondence from the organisation in question on 12th December and quite separately I received an email from them on 14 December 2012. This email was also sent to a number of Deputies and other addressees at the same time. I will of course be replying directly to the correspondence in due course.

The Deputy will be aware that the Commissioner's Policing Plan for 2013, which I laid before both Houses of the Oireachtas on 5th December 2012, sets out details of the closure of 100 Garda stations throughout the country, the future opening hours of other stations in Cork and Dublin and a number of District amalgamations. It is important to remember that while some Garda stations are listed for revised opening hours from 24 hour stations, they will remain as functioning Garda stations on a 24 hour basis. The full list of these details is available in the Policing Plan which is available in the Oireachtas Library.

The Commissioner has concluded that resources could be better deployed and more effectively used on the front-line if particular stations no longer had to be staffed and maintained or if the public opening hours of other stations could be reduced at off-peak times. In making that decision he has reiterated the commitment of An Garda Síochána to providing a professional and effective service to all communities, including those in rural areas. Each Divisional Officer with responsibility for a Division that will be affected by this decision has been tasked with

developing a comprehensive consultation strategy together with a tailored implementation plan that will meet the particular needs of their Division.

We also need to be honest about the level of policing service that was capable of being provided from the stations that were and are to be closed. Of the 100 stations to be closed next year, 98% are only open part-time, 94% are open for 3 hours a day or less, 88% are served by 1 Garda and only 5% are served by 3 or more Garda personnel. In fact, of the 39 stations closed this year, 8 were not actually open at all. Their closure was a paper exercise which simply recognised reality.

The intention will be that at all times optimum use is made of Garda resources and the best possible Garda service is provided to the public.

The revised structures will continue to support the community policing philosophy of An Garda Síochána through the clustering of services at policing hubs. This centralisation of services will facilitate the introduction of an enhanced grid patrolling system that will be operational and intelligence led. This patrol system will ensure that a high visibility and community oriented policing service continues to be delivered throughout the country.

Road Traffic Accidents Data

217. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when the Gardaí intend to publish data compiled by their road accident investigation unit into the cause of road accidents; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57580/12]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I am informed by the Garda authorities that An Garda Síochána do not publish data complied by Garda Forensic Collision Investigators. I am further advised that, in accordance with the provisions of the Road Safety Authority Act 2006, the RSA is responsible for the preparation, compilation and publication of information and statistics in respect of road safety matters.

Sex Offenders Notification Requirements

218. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons registered with the Gardaí who must comply with Part 2 of the Sex Offenders Act 2001; the number actually complying with Part 2 of the Act of 2001; the steps being taken to trace those who are not in compliance with the Act; the number of prosecutions for offences contrary to Part 2 of the Act to date in 2012; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57584/12]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The Sex Offenders Act 2001 contains a comprehensive series of provisions aimed at protecting children and other persons. Part 2 of the Act makes persons convicted of a range of sexual offences subject to notification requirements. The provisions of the Act also extend to any offenders convicted abroad of the same range of sexual offences who enter the State.

All offenders subject to the notification requirements are monitored by the Sex Offender Management and Intelligence Unit (SOMIU) at the Garda National Bureau of Criminal Investigation. The Unit is supported by Garda Inspectors nominated in each Garda Division throughout the State. I am informed that the nominated Inspector in each Division has access to all necessary resources within his/her Division to assist him/her in carrying out his/her duties.

Where An Garda Síochána becomes aware that an offender subject to the notification re-

quirements has breached those requirements, appropriate action is taken, including circulation through PULSE of their information, as well as inquiries to identify their current whereabouts. I am confident that the appropriate level of monitoring is carried out by An Garda Síochána and that all breaches of the requirements which come to notice are pursued.

In this regard, I am informed by the Garda authorities that, to 18 December, 2012, there were 1,239 persons subject to the requirements of Part 2 of the Act. I am further informed that there have been 54 prosecutions for offences contrary to Part 2 of the Act to date in 2012.

I am also informed that when the Garda authorities become aware that a convicted sex offender has left or is intending to leave the State, the Sex Offender Management and Intelligence Unit ensures that the relevant law enforcement agency in the country of destination is advised via Interpol.

Legislative Programme

219. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when he intends to publish legislation reforming the Sex Offenders Act 2001; the reason for the delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57585/12]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): My Department has been conducting an examination of the law on sexual offences generally. This includes a review of the Sex Offenders Act 2001. Having regard to competing legislative priorities, the review has been progressed as speedily as possible. This work is close to completion and I expect to bring a draft General Scheme to Government shortly with a view to seeking approval for the drafting of the necessary legislation.

This will be wide-ranging legislation and is not limited to reform of the Sex Offenders Act 2001. Inter alia, it will also implement the recommendations of two Oireachtas committees, facilitate full compliance with the criminal law provisions of relevant EU, UN and Council of Europe legal instruments, and reform the law on incest.

Proposed Legislation

220. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress made on the drafting of the legal costs Bill and the family law Bill; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57587/12]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The Legal Services Regulation Bill 2011 makes provision, among other things, for a new legal costs regime, applicable to both solicitors and barristers. It will bring greater transparency to how legal costs are charged and better balance the interests of legal practitioners and their clients as consumers. The new legal costs regime includes the requirement for a detailed 'Notice' to be provided by legal practitioners to their clients which includes either the known costs involved or, where this is not yet available, the basis upon which the relevant costs are to be calculated. The Notice, and any updates to it, will allow for a cooling-off period for consideration by the client. The Bill also sets out a series of Legal Costs Principles and provides for the creation of a new Office of the Legal Costs Adjudicator. This new Office will take over the current functions of the Office of the Taxing-Master and will modernise the way disputed legal costs are adjudicated. It will be empowered to prepare and publish Legal Costs Guidelines for the guidance of Legal Costs Adjudicators, legal practitioners and the public. It will also establish and maintain a publicly

available Register of Determinations which will include the outcomes and reasons for its decisions about disputed legal costs. Two new Taxing-Masters have been already been appointed by public competition in preparing the way for these reforms. Other reforms contained in the Bill include -

- a new, independent, Legal Services Regulatory Authority with responsibility for the oversight of both solicitors and barristers.

- an independent complaints system to deal with public complaints including those relating to professional misconduct. There will also be an independent Legal Practitioners' Disciplinary Tribunal to deal with both legal professions.

- a framework for new forms of legal services provision similar to those already being rolled out in other common law jurisdictions. These new or "alternative" business structures will be entirely optional alongside the more traditional forms of legal practice. Their availability will address a growing competitive disadvantage for our indigenous legal services sector.

I expect the Legal Services Regulation Bill, which completed Second Stage in the Dáil earlier this year, to commence Committee Stage in the first quarter of 2013.

The Government Legislation Programme includes a Family Law Bill to make provision for pension adjustments in the context of separation agreements and certain other reforms. Work on this Bill is under way in my Department. I am also, as I indicated in response to Parliamentary Question No. 66 of 11 December 2012, engaged in the preparation of a Family Relationships and Children Bill.

Garda Stations Closures

221. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the proposals to close rural Garda stations is implemented, the procedures that will be used to ensure that the Garda stations and the lands surrounding them are made available to community and voluntary groups; if the various development associations may make an application to take control of the said stations for local and community projects; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57602/12]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The implementation of the reduction in the number of Garda stations and Districts as set out in the Policing Plan for 2013 will take place in full consultation with the local communities and staffing interests. Local Garda management will shortly commence the process of engaging with these communities through the Joint Policing Committees and other fora to advise them of the revised policing arrangements for the localities in question. The objective will be to ensure that the best possible policing service will be provided at all times.

The question of the possible future use of the property is a matter for the Office of Public Works and I understand that they are open to proposals as to how best to utilise the premises in question.

Personal Debt

222. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when he expects to have the new Personal Insolvency Service up and running and dealing with individual cases; the number of individual cases the service will have the capacity to handle in 2013; his

estimate of the number of individual cases that will seek access to the service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57624/12]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The Personal Insolvency Service are working towards a launch date in Quarter 1 of 2013 that will include the opening of an office and website, the launch of an information campaign and the issuing of publications and relevant guidelines.

Intensive efforts are also under way to design and implement the regulatory and IT frameworks required to be in place prior to the Service accepting applications for the new debt solutions (Debt Relief Notices, Debt Settlement Arrangements and Personal Insolvency Arrangements). These should be in place during Quarter 2 of 2013.

I expect a significant number of persons to seek to avail of the new or reformed insolvency processes. However, it is difficult to be precise as it will very much depend on individual circumstances and the nature and extent of the debts involved. However, for broad planning purposes for the first full year of operation of the new law and systems, our tentative estimate - based on a rough extrapolation from the comparable UK and Northern Ireland circumstances – is: 15,000 applications for the two main non-judicial debt resolution processes – the Debt Settlement Arrangement and Personal Insolvency Arrangement; 3,000 to 4,000 applications for Debt Relief Notices; and 3,000 bankruptcy applications. There were about 30 bankruptcy adjudications in 2011. This number gives an insight into the contrasting increase in work that will arise on the implementation of this Bill.

The Deputy will appreciate that these estimates for debtors seeking to avail of the new arrangements are tentative. Not all insolvencies will require to be dealt with under the new statutory debt resolution processes or bankruptcy. I would expect that the certainty brought to the future legal landscape by this Bill will encourage debtors and creditors to agree bilaterally on alternative solutions. These solutions could involve settlement of mortgage debt under the mortgage arrears resolution process operated by mortgage lenders under the supervision of the Central Bank or otherwise.

Residency Permits

223. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Questions No. 172 of 20 September 2012 and No. 195 of 15 November 2012, if, in view of the fact that a person (details supplied) in County Kildare was legally in this country on foot of a work permit for more than five years and they were employed in the public sector, if he will give further consideration other than that already stated to their case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57643/12]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The person concerned entered the State on 3rd June, 2000 and was last granted permission to remain until 23rd July, 2010. The person concerned remained in the State since that date without permission. Consequently, in accordance with the provisions of Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), the person concerned was notified, by letter dated 10th November, 2010, that the then Minister proposed to make a Deportation Order in respect of her. She was given the options, to be exercised within 15 working days, of leaving the State voluntarily, of consenting to the making of a Deportation Order or of making representations to the Minister setting out the reasons why she should not have a Deportation Order made against her. Representations have been submitted on behalf of the person concerned.

The position in the State of the person concerned will now be decided by reference to the provisions of Section 3(6) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended) and Section 5 of the Refugee Act 1996 (as amended) on the prohibition of refoulement. All representations submitted will be considered before a final decision is made. Once a decision has been made, this decision, and the consequences of the decision, will be conveyed in writing to the person concerned.

Queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to the INIS by e-mail using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. This service enables up to date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek information by way of the Parliamentary Questions process. The Deputy may consider using the e-mail service except in cases where the response from the INIS is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

Family Reunification Applications

224. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding an application for family reunification in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 15; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57644/12]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) that the person referred to by the Deputy made a Family Reunification application in April 2011.

The application was forwarded to the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner as required under Section 18 of the Refugee Act 1996. The investigation was completed in December 2011 and a report was forwarded to INIS.

I am further informed by INIS that the application is currently under consideration, that a letter issued by INIS to the legal representatives of the person in question on 16th May 2012 and a response was received by INIS on 25th July 2012 advising that they would inform INIS of their client's instructions. To date no further correspondence has been received.

Queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to INIS by e-mail using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. This service enables up to date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek information by way of the Parliamentary Questions process. The Deputy may consider using the e-mail service except in cases where the response from INIS is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

Residency Permits

225. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding residency naturalisation in the case of persons (details supplied) in County Westmeath;; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57645/12]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The person concerned, together with the other family members referred to by the Deputy, are the subject of Deportation Orders, made against them, following a comprehensive and thorough examination of their asylum claims, applications for Subsidiary Protection and a detailed examination of the representations they submitted for consideration under Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended). There is no outstanding application for residency.

The effect of the Deportation Orders is that the persons concerned must leave the State and remain thereafter outside the State. The enforcement of the Deportation Orders is an operational matter for the Garda National Immigration Bureau.

There is no outstanding application for Zambrano in relation to the persons concerned.

I am satisfied that the applications made by the persons concerned for asylum and for temporary leave to remain in the State were fairly and comprehensively examined and, therefore, the decision to make Deportation Orders against them is justified.

Queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to the INIS by Email using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. This service enables up-to-date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek information by way of the Parliamentary Questions process. The Deputy may consider using the e-mail service except in cases where the response from the INIS is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

Residency Permits

226. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding a residency naturalisation application in respect of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 15; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57646/12]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): Officials in the Citizenship Division of the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) inform me that there is no record of an application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to in the Deputy's question.

Legally resident non-EEA nationals over the age of sixteen years are required to register with their local immigration registration officer.

It is open to any individual to lodge an application for citizenship if and when they are in a position to meet the statutory requirements as prescribed in the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956 as amended. Section 16 of the Act provides however that the Minister may, in his absolute discretion, grant an application for a certificate of naturalisation, although the conditions for naturalisation (or any of them) are not complied with, where the applicant is a naturalised Irish citizen acting on behalf of a minor child under the age of 18 years.

The naturalised parent of the person concerned may consider submitting an application for naturalisation on behalf of her child once the minor has regularised her immigration status with the relevant authorities and before she reaches the age 18. After that point she would be required to submit an application in her own right as an adult.

Queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to INIS by e-mail using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. This service enables up to date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek information by way of the Parliamentary Questions process. The Deputy may consider using the e-mail service except in cases where the response from INIS is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

Residency Permits

227. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the current and expected position and the reckonable residency in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 20; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57647/12]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) that a valid application for a certificate of naturalisation was received from the person referred to by the Deputy in August, 2010.

The application is at an advanced stage of processing. Numerous attempts have been made, without success, to contact the person concerned regarding his application. It is vital that an applicant keeps my Department informed of any changes to their contact details. The person concerned should now write to the Citizenship section to provide details in relation to his move to his new address.

Queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to INIS by e-mail using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. This service enables up to date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek information by way of the Parliamentary Questions process. The Deputy may consider using the e-mail service except in cases where the response from INIS is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

Residency Permits

228. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the current or expected position regarding determination of residency or entitlement to long term residency in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57648/12]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I refer the Deputy to my reply to Parliamentary Question No. 479 of Tuesday, 13th November 2012. The position remains as stated.

Reply to Parliamentary Question No. 479 of Tuesday, 13th November 2012

I am advised by the Citizenship Division of the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) that a valid application for a certificate of naturalisation was received from the person referred to by the Deputy in February, 2010.

The application is currently being processed with a view to establishing whether the applicant meets the statutory conditions for the granting of naturalisation and will be submitted to me for decision as expeditiously as possible. While good progress continues to be made in reducing the large volume of cases on hands, the nature of the naturalisation process is such that for a broad range of reasons some cases will take longer than others to process. It is a statutory requirement that, inter alia, applicants for naturalisation be of good character. In some instances that can be established relatively quickly and in other cases completing the necessary checks can take a considerable period of time. I can, however, inform the Deputy that enormous progress has been made in dealing with the backlog and steps are being taken to process all outstanding applications as quickly as possible.

Queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to INIS by e-mail using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for

this purpose. This service enables up to date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek information by way of the Parliamentary Questions process. The Deputy may consider using the e-mail service except in cases where the response from INIS is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

The applicant currently has permission to remain in the State until October 2015.

Deportation Orders Data

229. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will review the proposed deportation under prevention of refoulement criteria in the case of persons (details supplied) in County Meath;; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57649/12]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The persons concerned comprise a father and a mother and their two children. The father applied for asylum on 4th March, 2008. His asylum claim was refused. Arising from the refusal of his asylum application, and in accordance with the provisions of Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), he was notified, by letter dated 5th December, 2008, that the then Minister proposed to make a Deportation Order in respect of him. He was given the options, to be exercised within 15 working days, of leaving the State voluntarily, of consenting to the making of a Deportation Order or of making representations to the Minister setting out the reasons why a Deportation Order should not be made against him. In addition, he was notified of his entitlement to apply for Subsidiary Protection in accordance with the provisions of the European Communities (Eligibility for Protection) Regulations 2006.

The person concerned initiated Judicial Review Proceedings in the High Court, challenging the decision of the Refugee Appeals Tribunal in his case. The Judicial Review proceedings were struck out on 12th October, 2010 meaning that the earlier decisions of the Refugee Appeals Tribunal and the then Minister stood.

The position in the State of the father will now be decided by reference to the provisions of Section 3 (6) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended) and Section 5 of the Refugee Act 1996 (as amended) on the prohibition of refoulement. Any representations submitted will be considered before a final decision is made. Once a decision has been made, this decision, and the consequences of the decision, will be conveyed in writing to the person concerned.

The mother also applied for asylum on 4th March, 2008. Her asylum claim was also refused. Arising from the refusal of her asylum application, and in accordance with the provisions of Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), she was notified, by letter dated 15th November, 2010, that the then Minister proposed to make a Deportation Order in respect of her. She was given the options, to be exercised within 15 working days, of leaving the State voluntarily, of consenting to the making of a Deportation Order or of making representations to the Minister setting out the reasons why a Deportation Order should not be made against her. In addition, she was notified of her entitlement to apply for Subsidiary Protection in accordance with the provisions of the European Communities (Eligibility for Protection) Regulations 2006.

The mother submitted an application for Subsidiary Protection. When consideration of this application has been completed, she will be notified in writing of the outcome.

In the event that the application for Subsidiary Protection is refused, the position in the State of the person concerned will then be decided by reference to the provisions of Section 3 (6) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended) and Section 5 of the Refugee Act 1996 (as amended) on the prohibition of refoulement. Any representations submitted will be considered before a

final decision is made. Once a decision has been made, this decision, and the consequences of the decision, will be conveyed in writing to the mother concerned.

A separate asylum application was lodged on behalf of the couple's eldest child on 13th May, 2008. This application was also refused. Arising from the refusal of this asylum application, and in accordance with the provisions of Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), this child was notified, by letter dated 15th November, 2010, that the then Minister proposed to make a Deportation order in respect of her. She was given the options, to be exercised within 15 working days, of leaving the State voluntarily, of consenting to the making of a Deportation Order or of making representations to the Minister setting out the reasons why a Deportation Order should not be made against her. In addition, she was notified of her entitlement to apply for Subsidiary Protection in accordance with the provisions of the European Communities (Eligibility for Protection) Regulations 2006.

This child lodged an application for Subsidiary Protection. When consideration of this application has been completed, the child concerned will be notified in writing of the outcome. In the event that the application for Subsidiary Protection is refused, the position in the State of the child concerned will then be decided by reference to the provisions of Section 3 (6) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended) and Section 5 of the Refugee Act 1996 (as amended) on the prohibition of refoulement. Any representations submitted will be considered before a final decision is made. Once a decision has been made, this decision, and the consequences of the decision, will be conveyed in writing to the child concerned.

An asylum application was lodged in respect of the couple's second child on 10th July, 2012. The Deputy will appreciate that it is not my practice to comment on individual asylum applications where a final decision has not been made.

It is unlikely that the Zambrano Judgment will have any impact on the cases of the couple in question given that no evidence has been submitted to date to suggest that any of the couple's children can claim an entitlement to Irish citizenship. The Deputy will appreciate that, in an Irish context, the terms of the Zambrano Judgment can only be applied to third country national parents of an Irish born minor citizen child who are residing in this State with their Irish born minor citizen child or children.

Queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to the INIS by e-mail using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. This service enables up to date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek information by way of the Parliamentary Questions process. The Deputy may consider using the e-mail service except in cases where the response from the INIS is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

Food Safety Standards Inspections

230. **Deputy Heather Humphreys** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will confirm that poultry produce used in meals for prisons is Bord Bia quality assured; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57679/12]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The current contract for the provision of fresh poultry products for the Irish Prison Service was placed with Crossgar Foodservices, an Northern Ireland company following an open tender competition in accordance with EU Procurement Directives.

I am advised by the Irish Prison Service (IPS) that all the poultry produce currently supplied

through this contract is certified as been reared, slaughtered, cut and packed in accordance with the Bord Bia Poultry Products Quality Assurance Scheme (PPQAS).

Air Accident Investigations

231. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Defence if the Defence Forces have completed their investigation into the heavy landing by the Air Corps air ambulance on 19 June last; the results and recommendations on foot of the investigation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57459/12]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): The Air Accident Investigation Unit of the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport is carrying out an investigation following the heavy landing incident involving the Emergency Aeromedical Support (EAS) service helicopter which occurred on 19 June 2012. This investigation is ongoing.

Food Safety Standards Inspections

232. **Deputy Heather Humphreys** asked the Minister for Defence if he will confirm that poultry produce used in meals for army barracks is Bord Bia quality assured; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57678/12]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): The current contract for the provision of fresh poultry products to the Defence Forces is with Kildare Farm Foods, an Irish Company based in Kildare, who were awarded the contract as part of an open tendering competition, carried out in accordance with national and EU procurement rules. Overall procurement policy is a matter, in the first instance, for the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

I am advised that Kildare Farms Foods is not a member of the Board Bia quality assurance scheme. However the company has a full traceability system which allows them to trace their product back to the farmer; this system is detailed and rigorous and is monitored by both the Defence Forces and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine. The Defence Forces have indicated that they are satisfied the products are fully certified and compliant with national and EU requirements.

Departmental Properties

233. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghaíl** asked the Minister for Defence the number of vacant residential units in the ownership of his Department on the Curragh Camp, County Kildare, or in its environs; if he will provide a description of the properties concerned; the expenditure, if any, that was incurred over the past five years in the maintenance, repair or renovation of each individual property; if he has a plan for the use of these residential units; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57705/12]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): There are 40 residential properties (former married quarters) vacant in the Curragh Camp environs in various states of repair but the majority of which are uninhabitable. 39 of these properties are within the confines of the Camp and the remaining property is in Orchard Park.

In February 1997 the then Minister for Defence set out policy on married quarters on the basis that they were largely an anachronism and that they should be discontinued in a managed

and orderly way. In the circumstances the properties within the confines of the Camp will not be re-allocated and will remain vacant pending a decision on conversion to other military use or demolition. The property in Orchard Park, which is outside the confines of the Camp, will, as have the majority of properties there, be sold in due course.

It is not possible to indicate how much has been spent on repair and maintenance on each individual property over the last five years, however because of the Department's policy of non allocation the amount is minimal and relates mainly to securing the vacant properties.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Appeals

234. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a decision will be made on a disadvantaged area scheme in respect of a person (details provided) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57363/12]

235. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a decision will be made on an appeal for derogation in respect of a person (details provided) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57366/12]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 234 and 235 together.

An application under the 2012 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme was received from the person named on 13 April 2012. There are currently two outstanding issues preventing payment.

The first relates to the DAS derogation procedure under which an application was unsuccessful. In accordance with usual practice, the applicant was offered the option to appeal to the independently chaired DAS Appeals Committee. To date, this option has not been availed of. Should the applicant choose to appeal, it will be referred to the DAS Appeals Committee.

In addition, a further condition of the Scheme has not been satisfied, at this stage, in regard to inclusion of equines for the purposes of meeting the minimum stocking density requirement. The Terms and Conditions governing the Scheme require, *inter alia* , that in order for equines to be eligible, they must be in a registered breeding enterprise and meet certain qualifying criteria. The person concerned has already been advised by my Department of the outstanding matters in regard to stocking density. Once it has been established that this requirement has been satisfied, the application concerned can be further processed with a view to payment.

Grassland Sheep Scheme Eligibility

236. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason a payment under the sheep grassland scheme was recouped by his Department in July 2012 having been paid to a person (details enclosed) in County Galway in February 2012; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57378/12]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named originally declared thirty two breeding ewes on their 2010 sheep census declaration and was paid accordingly. Subsequently, an additional census form was received on reducing the number of breeding ewes declared by the applicant to zero. The case was recalculated based on the more recent declaration and payments adjusted accordingly.

Fish Quotas

237. **Deputy John Browne** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the date on which total allowable catch and quota arrangements were introduced by the European Union in relation to boar fish; the percentage of the total allowable catch and the quota allocation for Ireland negotiated during the 2010 December EU Fisheries Council meeting; the quota allocation for 2012; the proposals he has to secure additional allocations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57413/12]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Boarfish has in recent years become the target of commercial fishing by the Irish fishing fleet. The December 2010 Council of Fisheries Ministers introduced the first Boarfish quota for the 2011 fishing year, where Ireland secured a quota of 22,000t. At the December 2011 Fisheries Council I negotiated a significantly increased quota of 56,666t for the 2012, which included a redistribution of an "All Member States" quota, this gives Ireland 69% of the total EU catch.

Negotiations for the 2013 TAC are ongoing at the moment however this will be one of the most difficult Fisheries Council's in years. There are considerable challenges posed by the range of issues before us at this year's Council and I will be working hard to deliver on TACs that respect scientific advice, reduce the unacceptable practice of discarding fish at sea and are set on a rational basis.

It is essential to the future sustainability of our domestic fishing industry that we obtain a fair and positive outcome to these discussions from Ireland's perspective. This is particularly important given Ireland's imminent presidency of the EU and our strong desire to advance the wider Common Fisheries Policy reform agenda during that time. It is essential therefore that the industry and other stakeholders are fully aware of the huge challenges faced at this Council and of the range of difficulties faced in getting a satisfactory outcome for Ireland in the coming days.

Horse and Greyhound Fund

238. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the amount of grant aid, loan guarantees and tax exemptions provided to the horse and greyhound industry in 2011 and 2012. [57423/12]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): State support for the horse and greyhound racing industries is provided through the Horse and Greyhound Racing Fund (the Fund), which was established under the Horse and Greyhound Racing Act 2001, to Horse Racing Ireland and Bord na gCon to assist them in carrying out their functions.

The level of support for these industries has been reduced by 28% since 2008 due to budgetary constraints.

The level of funding provided to the horse and greyhound racing industries in 2011 and 2012 was as follows:

-	2011	2012
Horse Racing Ireland	45.8m	45m
Bord na gCon	11.5m	11.3m

My Department does not provide loan guarantees to either Horse Racing Ireland or Bord na gCon. Issues in relation to tax exemptions are a matter for my colleague the Minister for Finance, Michael Noonan, TD, who has responsibility for all matters relating to taxation. However, the tax exemption in relation to profits derived from stallion coverings was discontinued from 1 August 2008.

Horse and Greyhound Industry

239. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of jobs based on the horse and greyhound industry and the statistical basis for assessing the number employed in the sector; and if he will provide a breakdown of this figure. [57424/12]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The total employment in the Irish thoroughbred horse industry, both direct and indirect, was estimated to be 17,351 in 2010. This figure is contained in a report, commissioned by Irish Thoroughbred Breeders' Association, entitled *"Analysis of the economic impact of the Irish Thoroughbred Horse Industry - Report Update"*, Alan Dukes (2010). This Report can be obtained from the Irish Thoroughbred Breeders' Association.

The total employment in the greyhound industry, both direct and indirect, was estimated at 10,369 in 2011. This figure is contained in a report commissioned by Bord na gCon, "*The Economic & Financial Significance of the Irish Greyhound Industry",* Jim Power (2011). This report can be obtained from Bord na gCon.

Horse and Greyhound Fund

240. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the primary purpose of the horse and greyhound fund; and if it should be used to provide funding for the prize money for races. [57425/12]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Horse and Greyhound Racing Fund (the Fund) was established under section 12(1) of the Horse and Greyhound Racing Act 2001 (the Act) for the purpose of giving support to the horse and greyhound racing industries. The commitment of public monies through the Fund to investment in the sectors has enabled Ireland to develop into a world centre of excellence for horseracing, greyhound racing and breeding.

Section 12(8) of the Act states that Horse Racing Ireland (HRI) and Bord na gCon shall apply moneys paid to them from the Fund only in the performance of their functions.

One of the general functions of HRI under section 8(1) of the Act is the stake holding of prize money for horse races.

Section 16 (1)(*c*)(i) of the Greyhound Industry Act, 1958 states that the Board of Bord na gCon may apply its funds to the increase of stake money and prizes.

Prize money produces a significant multiplier effect. The HRI "*Fact Book 2011*" shows that HRI contributed €34m to prize money in 2008. A report entitled "*Analysis of the economic impact of the Irish Thoroughbred Horse Industry"*, Alan Dukes (2009), showed that in the same year (2008) owners spent €290m on horses in training and racing fees which in turn provided support for rural employment across the country.

In Ireland, in the horse racing industry, 24% of winning prize money is distributed to trainers, riders and stable staff.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Payments

241. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a decision is due on an agri environment options scheme payment for 2012 in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57426/12]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named was approved for participation in the 2011 Agri-Environment Options Scheme with effect from the 1st September 2011 and full payment totalling €338.07 issued in respect of 2011.

Under the EU Regulations governing the Scheme and other area-based payment schemes, a comprehensive administrative check, including cross-checks with the Land Parcel Identification System, must be completed before any payment can issue.

Payments in respect of the 2012 Scheme year are subject to a similar administrative checking process which includes verification of capital investment through checks on receipts. These checks are under way and once successfully completed I expect 2012 payment to issue to the person named.

Flood Risk Assessments

242. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will request Teagasc to investigate new drainage issues that have arisen in the east Galway area in the Suck catchment basin, as fields that were never flooded before have been flooded on a consistent basis this year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57435/12]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The assessment and management of flood risks is in the first instance the responsibility of the Office of Public Works.

As the deputy is acutely aware 2012 has been a very difficult year for farmers having to cope with the bad weather. Parts of the country received over 200% of the average summer rainfall. In Galway the summer and autumn months experienced above average rainfall, even though the yearly average was in keeping with the national picture.

Farmers affected by the flooding in the Suck catchment in East Galway should contact the Office of Public Works locally for advice on the best course of action available. Where the issue relates to individual parcels of land, the farmer should contact their local Teagasc advisor or private Agricultural Consultant.

Food Industry Development

243. **Deputy Jerry Buttimer** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the strategy employed to increase the availability of Irish food and products in supermarkets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57450/12]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Under the terms of our EU membership, goods and services move freely within the Single Market which benefits a food exporting country such as Ireland which recorded a 25% increase in food and drink exports in the past two years to reach €8.8 billion in 2011.

Member States may not use public funds to promote sales of products based on origin. Quality assurance schemes may, however, show origin in a secondary capacity. That is the case for the Bord Bia beef, lamb, pigmeat, poultry and horticulture quality assurance schemes, which enjoy a high degree of consumer awareness and recognition and are very visible on supermarket shelves.

I am pleased to see supermarkets increasingly publicise the value of the Irish food and drink products that they purchase and details of new contracts concluded with small suppliers. Such publicity is particularly useful for own brand products where information on origin may be quite limited. EU requirements on origin labelling are limited. They do cover raw beef and veal; raw poultry meat from a third country; fruit and vegetables, and honey but origin is not required for other foods unless its absence would mislead the consumer.

Bord Bia works with producers directly and through major marketing events such as Marketplace Ireland 2012 to advise food and drink businesses on routes to market including supermarkets and on how to identify and build on business opportunities in a very competitive trading environment.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Payments

244. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will urgently issue payment under the 2012 disadvantaged areas scheme to a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57457/12]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Payment under the 2012 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme issued to the person named on 19 December 2012, directly to the nominated bank account.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Appeals

245. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a decision has been made on an appeal to the disadvantaged area appeal committee in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57481/12]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named is one of a number, their derogation application having been unsuccessful, who were offered the option to appeal to the independently chaired DAS Appeals Committee. To date, this option has not been availed of. Should the applicant choose to appeal, it will be referred to the DAS Appeals Committee.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Appeals

246. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a decision has been made on an appeal to the disadvantaged area appeals committee in respect

of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57482/12]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The appeal of the person named was recently forwarded to the DAS Appeals Committee for consideration; immediately that Committee has adjudicated on this appeal, the person concerned will be notified of their decision, in writing.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Appeals

247. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a decision has been made on an appeal to disadvantaged area appeals committee in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57483/12]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person concerned is an applicant under the 2012 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme. This applicant is one of a number, whose cases are impacted by a requirement of a minimum stocking density of 0.3 livestock units per forage hectare and who applied for and were refused derogation in this regard.

The person subsequently availed of the option to appeal to the independently chaired DAS Appeals Committee. The Committee has adjudicated on this appeal and the person concerned has been notified of the unsuccessful outcome, in writing, on 13 December 2012.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Appeals

248. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a decision has been made on an appeal to the disadvantaged area appeals committee in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57484/12]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): As processing of the 2012 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme application has recently been finalised, payment will shortly issue to the nominated bank account.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Appeals

249. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a decision has been made on an appeal to the disadvantaged area appeals committee in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57485/12]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The appeal of the person named was recently forwarded to the DAS Appeals Committee for consideration; immediately that Committee has adjudicated on this appeal, the person concerned will be notified of their decision, in writing.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Appeals

250. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a decision has been made on an appeal to the disadvantaged area appeals committee in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57486/12]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The appeal of the person named was recently forwarded to the DAS Appeals Committee for consideration; immediately that Committee has adjudicated on this appeal, the person concerned will be notified of their decision, in writing.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Appeals

251. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a decision has been made on a an appeal to the disadvantaged area appeals committee in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57487/12]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person concerned is an applicant under the 2012 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme. This applicant is one of a number, whose cases are impacted by a requirement of a minimum stocking density of 0.3 livestock units per forage hectare and who applied for and were refused derogation in this regard.

The person subsequently availed of the option to appeal to the independently chaired DAS Appeals Committee. The Committee have adjudicated on this appeal and the person concerned has been notified of the unsuccessful outcome, in writing, on 13 December 2012.

Tax Code

252. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on stamp duty (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57488/12]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): I am pleased to inform the deputy that there was no decision to abolish the relief on stamp duty on land transfers for young farmers. This important relief was due to end this year but is once again being extended. The relief plays a vital role in encouraging the timely inter-generational transfer of family farms. Irish and EU agricultural and rural development policies are consistent in providing support and encouragement for the transfer of farms to young farmers.

Credit Availability

253. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his attention has been drawn to the lack of credit availability for farmers; if he anticipates the cash flow problem to worsen for persons due to increased winter feeding costs; if he has liaised with the Department for Finance and credit institutions in an effort to improve this situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57490/12]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): I am aware that, like many other sectors, farmers can find it difficult to get credit due to the strict assessments introduced as a result of the global financial crisis. I am of course also conscious of the reduction in farmers' incomes this year and the increase in input costs as a result of the adverse weather, with feed costs likely to remain high. There has, however, been an upward revision in crop forecasts in the last week and I welcome the fact that exports from the agri-food sector have maintained the growth achieved during 2010 and 2011.

My officials are in regular contact with farm bodies, various national banks and the Banking Federation concerning the availability of credit to farmers. My officials have assisted one of the farm organizations in explaining the work of the Credit Review Office, so that they can help their members in this regard. Despite the concerns expressed about lack of credit, a relatively small number of cases from the Agri-Food sector have come before the Credit Review Office. I would encourage farmers to make use of this system should they have difficulty in accessing credit.

I am aware that a number of banks have designed new credit facilities specifically tailored for the agri-food sector in recent months. In addition, the most recent Central Bank data for lending to SMEs, covering Q3 2012, shows that the agriculture sector was top of the list in value terms for new lending to SMEs during the quarter. With a total of €138m, it was far ahead of the second placed retail sector on €84m and represented 31% Excluding Financial Intermediation and Property Services of all such new lending during the period. This level of new lending (31% of all new lending) also applies over the year to date, during which €401m was provided to the sector. I am also pleased to note a 16.7% increase in the number of new tractors registered year-on-year and a 46% increase over the last two years.

http://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/vlftm/vehicleslicensedforthefirsttimenovember2012/

I will continue to meet with relevant parties on a regular basis to discuss all credit-related issues.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Reopening

254. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if future opening windows for agri schemes will be open longer to enable planners to deal with the large volumes of work that they must undertake; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57491/12]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): I announced the re-opening of the Agri-environmental Options Scheme to new applicants on 25 September with a closing date for the receipt of applications of 30 November. I extended the original closing date of to 7 December to allow the preparation and completion of applications by applicants and planners. In setting closing dates for any schemes that may be introduced in the future, I will consider all relevant issues in setting an appropriate date.

Commonage Division

255. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding new commonage regulations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57492/12]

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 has been carried out by the National Parks and Wildlife Service in co-operation with my Department. The review was carried out 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. I will work with the farmers, farm organisations and others to design a practical solution.

Single Payment Scheme Payments

256. **Deputy Michael McCarthy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason for the delay in issuing disadvantaged area and single farm payment in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57501/12]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): An application under the 2012 Single Payment/Disadvantaged Areas Schemes was received from the person named on 14th May 2012.

In order to comply with EU requirements, the applicant was one of a number selected for inspection. The outcome of the inspection process is that, while it was necessary to reduce the eligible area, a reduction in the herd-owners payments does not arise as he has sufficient eligible land to cover all of his declared entitlements under the 2012 Single Payment Scheme.

An advance payment was made to the herd-owners nominated bank account on 15th November. The balancing payment under the Single Payment Scheme and the payment due under the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme payment will issue shortly.

Single Payment Scheme Payments

257. **Deputy Noel Harrington** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will have the files in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Cork reviewed again, regarding the penalty imposed this year on their single farm payment, taking into consideration the inaccuracies outlined in documents attached; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57508/12]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department will re-examine this case in light of the additional information now provided and will be in contact with the person named in this regard.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Payments

258. **Deputy Michael P. Kitt** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payment under the disadvantaged area scheme will issue in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Galway. [57541/12]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person concerned is an applicant under the 2012 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme. This applicant is one of a number, whose cases are impacted by a requirement of a minimum stocking density of 0.3 livestock units per forage hectare and who applied for and were refused derogation in this regard.

The person named subsequently availed of the option to appeal to the independently chaired DAS Appeals Committee. The Committee has adjudicated on this appeal and the person concerned has been notified of the unsuccessful outcome, in writing, on 13 December 2012.

Rainwater Harvesting Scheme

259. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will outline the details of the new water harvesting scheme including the level of grant and eligibility criteria; when the scheme will open up; the period of the funding programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57577/12]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Rainwater Harvesting Scheme which is one of the Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme (TAMS) operated by my Department reopened for applications on 20 December 2011. It is intended that the scheme will remain open for applications until end 2013, which is the final date for the receipt of applications under the TAMS under the Rural Development Programme 2007-2013. The grant-rate is 40% up to a maximum eligible investment ceiling of €25,000 per holding, i.e. a maximum grant of €10,000.

Copies of the terms and conditions of the Scheme, together with the accompanying application form, are available on my Department's website and these set out the eligibility conditions applicable to farmers who wish to apply for grant-aid under the Scheme. As the funding for the Scheme is limited, a series of tranches is in place in order to ensure that the financial allocation for the Scheme is not exceeded. The current tranche closes on 31 December 2012.

Single Payment Scheme Applications

260. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding payment in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Limerick; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57672/12]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named is an applicant under the 2012 Single Payment and Disadvantaged Areas Schemes.

In order to comply with EU requirements, the application was one of a number which was selected for inspection. Following the completion of the inspection and related processes, an over-claim of in excess of 20% was confirmed, resulting in no payment being due. The applicant was informed to this effect by letter dated 13th November and of the right of appeal.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Appeals

261. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a decision has been made on an appeal to the disadvantaged area appeals committee in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[57682/12]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The appeal of the person named was recently forwarded to the DAS Appeals Committee for consideration; immediately that Committee has adjudicated on this appeal, the person concerned will be notified of their decision, in writing.

Beef Industry Issues

262. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the discussions he has had to date with EU Trade Commissioner de Gucht in relation to the EU-Canadian trade negotiations in view of the absolute need to protect the European beef market in view of the importance of the beef sector to the economy here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57683/12]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): I contacted Commissioner De Gucht last month to draw his attention to the very serious concerns I have regarding the EU/Canadian trade negotiations, and, in particular, the issue of market access for beef. This follows a constant series of interventions dating back to April of this year, both written and oral, at official and political level with the Directorates for Trade and for Agriculture of the European Commission.

Ireland's main concerns are two-fold. First we object to the fact that Canada refuses to accept OIE standards in this instance and will not allow access for EU beef while at the same time it expects that we will grant large quotas to it. Second we have major concerns with the reported size and composition of these quotas.

On the issue of principle, Ireland has consistently asked that the Canadian side respect International standards, as many other countries do, in relation to market access for beef. We have indicated in our submissions to the Commission that this is a stumbling block for Ireland. We do not think it unreasonable to expect Canada to acknowledge this in the context of the negotiations. To be constructive, we have suggested that any agreement should include a standstill clause or moratorium on the activation of any beef quotas such that there will be no activation of quotas until Canada allows market access for EU beef.

As regards the size and composition of any quota, I have suggested that any quota must respect the sensitivity of the EU market in relation to high value cuts and not the totality of the EU beef market. Essentially this means that any quota must be limited in size and must take account of the segmentation of the EU market for beef between high value cuts and other beef – used primarily for manufacturing.

These are not the only concerns I have in regard to these negotiations. I am also anxious that we secure reasonable market access for EU dairy products to the Canadian market. Moreover, the current offers regarding fisheries are not satisfactory in my view and there are outstanding difficulties too regarding the recognition by Canada at sub-national level of certain geographical indications for spirits. As these negotiations proceed, I will continue to press all of these points vigorously with the Commission and with other Member States.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Eligibility

263. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the

changes in the disadvantaged area scheme for 2013 for applicants in designated mountain areas; the amount to be saved by these cuts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57718/12]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): I was extremely pleased that, even within tight budgetary discipline, I was able to increase the funding for Disadvantaged Areas Scheme by €5 million in 2013, to bring the total funds available up to €195 million. However, in view of the existing level of expenditure under this Scheme in 2012, it is still necessary to make adjustments, in order to keep within the new allocation. I did, however, ensure that farmers, particularly sheep farmers farming mountain type grazing, will not have their aid, which is important to the viability of their farming enterprises, reduced.

In order the carry out the adjustment, I decided to reduce the area maximum area payable from 34 to 30 hectares in respect of farmers situated in More Severely and Less Severely Disadvantaged Areas. By achieving this adjustment in this manner, together with a number of technical changes, over 72% of all applicants will not have their basic aid changed. The technical adjustments will be finalised when details of the final outturn of the 2012 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme are clearer in the New Year.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Eligibility

264. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason that the press release issued by him (details supplied) did not outline the cut to non-sheep farmers in disadvantaged mountain areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57719/12]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): I was extremely pleased that, even within tight budgetary discipline, I was able to increase the funding for Disadvantaged Areas Scheme by €5 million in 2013, to bring the total funds available up to €195 million. However, in view of the existing level of expenditure under this Scheme in 2012, it is still necessary to make adjustments, in order to keep within the new allocation. I did, however, ensure that farmers, particularly sheep farmers farming mountain type grazing, will not have their aid, which is important to the viability of their farming enterprises, reduced.

In order to carry out the adjustment, I outlined in my Press release of the 6th December that I had decided to reduce the area maximum area payable from 34 to 30 hectares in respect of farmers situated in More Severely and Less Severely Disadvantaged Areas. By achieving this adjustment in this manner, together with a number of technical changes, over 72% of all applicants will not have their basic aid changed. The technical adjustments, referred to in the press release, will be finalised when details of the final outturn of the 2012 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme are clearer in the New Year.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Application Numbers

265. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of farmers in mountain areas who applied for the disadvantaged area scheme in 2012; the numbers of these who have mountain sheep holdings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57720/12]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): As it has not been possible to compile the information in the available timescale, my Department will forward it directly to the Deputy.

Departmental Expenditure

266. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the money provided in the estimate for 2012; the amount spent to date in 2012 broken down between capital and current expenditure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57724/12]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The information requested by the Deputy is as follows:

Estimate 2012

Gross €1,338.8m.

Of which:-

- Current €1,143.9m.

- Capital €194.9m.

Payments are issuing daily and will continue to the 31st December. I don't expect significant savings in the context of the overall Budget. Details of spending as of the 31st December will be forwarded to the Deputy for his information.

Commonage Division

267. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when vesting of the Pollnacloughe Commonage near Moycullen, County Galway, will be complete; the details of any outstanding issues that need to be resolved before this vesting takes place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57725/12]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): A Vesting Order has been prepared and is awaiting the completion of one outstanding Dealing Number in the Property Registration Authority which will make one of the allottees a Nominee for the purposes of vesting. My officials have requested that this matter be expedited so that the Vesting Order can be lodged. I anticipate that this will happen early in the New Year.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Payments

268. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason a person (details supplied) has not been paid their disadvantaged area payment for 2012 in view of the fact that they were not written to by his Department in relation to their 2011 stocking density and that his Department has a letter from 2011 on file outlining the restrictions imposed on them under REP scheme 3, and that they had applied for the agri environment option scheme 3 and that there farm is in the Twelve Bens Complex where stocking levels are restricted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57736/12]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Payment under the 2012 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme has not yet issued as, at this stage, the holding concerned has not yet satisfied the Scheme minimum stocking density requirements for 2012.

In processing this application, my Department took into account the stocking restrictions applicable to the Twelve Bens Complex. However, to date, information available to my Depart-

ment indicates the absence of any livestock on the holding in 2012. In the event that the applicant can demonstrate that the holding meets the relevant requirements, the case can be further processed with a view to payment.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Applications

269. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of persons who have applied for a derogation under the stocking density rules of the disadvantaged area scheme 2012; the number who have been granted a derogation; the number refused and the number of outstanding appeals still to be dealt with; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57737/12]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department received 9,635 applications from farmers seeking a derogation from the requirement under the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme that the minimum stocking density on the holding should be 0.3 livestock units per hectare or higher in respect of 2011. These applications have been fully processed and 6,763 applications were successful, 2,342 were rejected and additional information was sought from 530 applicants. The applicants, who were rejected, were informed of their entitlement to appeal their case to the Independent Disadvantaged Areas Appeals Committee. Appeals were received from 1,426 applicants and 657 of there are fully processed. The remaining applications will be processed as quickly as possible.

Harbours and Piers Funding

270. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the amount of money allocated in the 2013 estimates for the development of Fishery Harbours managed by his Department; the amount of this required to meet existing commitments in 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57739/12]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department is responsible for the administration of the Fishery Harbour and Coastal Infrastructure Capital Development Programme which provides funding for works at the Department's harbours on an annual basis and in addition, where exchequer funds allow, funding is made available for Local Authority owned piers and harbours.

The allocation of funding within the Programme is currently under consideration.

Forestry Sector

271. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if there are any restrictions on Coillte in relation to the sale of land in view of the proposed sale by Coillte of 11,000ha of land near Ballybofey, County Donegal; if he was consulted about this sale; if he intends putting any restrictions in place in relation to the sale by Coillte of parcels of land over 50ha, without his permission; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57746/12]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): I understand that the area involved in the proposed sale, to which the Deputy refers, is actually 448.8 hectares which equates to some 1,109 acres, not '11,000ha' as appears in text of question.

The current policy in regard to the sale of land by Coillte is as provided in the Forestry Act 1988 and the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies, with which Coillte, as a state body, must comply.

Day-to-day operational matters, such as the sale and acquisition of land which take place regularly, are the responsibility of the company. As the transaction to which the Deputy refers is an operational matter at the discretion of the company, I was not consulted specifically about this proposed sale.

School Completion Programme

272. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will reverse the cuts to a programme (details supplied) in view of the work carried out by them and the minimum cost involved in this organisation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [57469/12]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The School Completion Programme (SCP) aims to retain young people in the formal education system to completion of senior cycle and to improve children's participation and attendance in school.

In 2013, funding of €26.456m has been made available by my Department to support the programme, which involves 124 projects and initiatives throughout the country.

The Comprehensive Review of Expenditure (CRE) identified the requirement for savings of 6.5% per annum over the period 2012-2014. Projects and initiatives were required to reduce their budget by 6.5% for the 12/13 school year to achieve the necessary savings in 2012.

Projects were requested to revise their plans for 2012/13 in order to achieve efficiencies and reduce costs whilst prioritising evidence based services to support children's educational outcomes. The National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB), under the remit of my Department, has provided assistance to projects through this process in accordance with its management responsibilities for the programme.

In the present challenging financial circumstances it is not feasible to alter the notified allocations to individual projects.

My Department intends to complete a review of the SCP over the course 2013. The Department will consult with individual projects and initiatives within the SCP as part of this process. This review provides the opportunity to identify best practice, to clarify roles and responsibilities and to build upon the learning and experience to date.

It is anticipated that the review will assist to identify operational efficiencies and other reforms necessary to consolidate the programme on a sustainable footing as a key component of an integrated school support service under the NEWB.

My Department and the NEWB continue to work closely with management committees, schools and local SCP coordinators to ensure available resources are targeted to deliver tailored support to meet the needs of students.

Child Care Services Provision

273. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will

provide clarity on the situation regarding the level of funding from the Health Service Executive that is provided in respect of a group (details supplied); if this funding is being withdrawn is it a national or local decision; if her attention has been drawn to only local support to non-regulated childminders is provided through the Health Service Executive funded Childminders' Advisory Worker Post; if she will clarify the bodies that will support this sector if HSE funding is discontinued. [57505/12]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I understand that there has been a reduction in funding by the Health Service Executive (HSE) to the City and County Childcare Committees in some areas. The HSE has, however, confirmed that it will endeavour to support the CCCs wherever possible. I have asked my Department to engage further with the Committees and the HSE and to provide a report to me on this matter.

My Department provides annual funding to each CCC to enable it to support and advise all childcare providers at local level. In 2012, the total amount allocated to the CCCs was €11.3m. My Department also provides annual funding, totalling €2.85m in 2012, to the seven National Voluntary Childcare Organisations, including Childminding Ireland, who provide support at a local level to their members.

In relation to the specific funding provided by the HSE to the service referred to, I have asked the HSE to examine this matter and to respond directly to the Deputy with the most up-to-date information.

Youth Services Provision

274. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs further to Parliamentary Question No. 961 of 6 November 2012, if she will detail the funding allocation for 2013 in respect of this front line youth service; the steps she is taking to safeguard the valuable work of this service; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [57681/12]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Youth Affairs Unit of my Department supports the delivery of a range of youth work programmes and services for all young people, including those from disadvantaged communities, by the voluntary youth sector. Targeted supports for disadvantaged, marginalised and at risk young people are provided through the Special Projects for Youth Scheme, the Young Peoples Facilities and Services Fund Rounds 1 and 2 and Local Drugs Task Force Projects.

My Department is working on the funding allocation for youth services in 2013. Having regard to the savings requirements identified in the Comprehensive Review of Expenditure my Department is seeking to ensure that, in the determination process for the allocations, the front line youth services, particularly those for the most vulnerable young people are protected as far as is possible from the impact of any necessary reductions in funding.

In this context, full consideration is being given to the project in question as part of the range of youth work services in its locality. No decisions have been made by my Department neither in relation to the 2013 funding for youth services throughout the country, nor in relation to the funding allocations to be provided for individual projects, including the project referred to by the Deputy. Youth organisations and projects will be advised of their 2013 allocations as soon as possible.

Child and Family Support Agency Remit

275. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her attention has been drawn to the concerns of psychologists regarding her proposals to move all child psychology services to the child and family support agency; if her attention has been drawn to the fact that most referrals to child psychology services come through primary care staff; if an impact analysis has been carried out to assess the consequences for children who require multi-disciplinary support such as is currently provided through the multi-disciplinary primary care team model [57698/12]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Government has given approval to the drafting of a Bill to establish the Child and Family Support Agency. Work on the preparation of the legislation is proceeding as a priority and the intention is that the Agency will be established in early 2013. In order to inform the content of the legislation the Government has decided that upon establishment the Child and Family Support Agency will have responsibility for a range of services. This includes the full range of child welfare and protection services currently operated by the HSE including family support and alternative care services. Due to its particular relevance, it has also been decided to include domestic, sexual and gender-based violence services within the Agency's responsibilities. The Government has further decided that the new Agency will assume responsibility for the functions of both the Family Support Agency and the National Educational Welfare Board. These two organisations currently operate under the aegis of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. The draft legislation will also provide for the provision of community-based psychology services to children and families by the Agency. It is envisaged that this will involve the transfer of certain psychology staff currently employed by the HSE who are operating within a community setting.

The Government's consideration of these matters was informed, inter alia, by the content and recommendations of the Report of the Task Force on the Child and Family Support Agency which I published in July of this year. The Task Force considered that the Agency needs to be as broadly based as possible and should include those services that might, in the first instance, help prevent problems arising for a family, that would identify problems and provide supports at an early stage and that would assist children and families in managing serious problems requiring specialised interventions beyond their own resources. Therefore, in addition to child welfare and protection services the Task Force considered that the core services of the new Agency must include a broad based range of universal and targeted services with an emphasis on prevention, early intervention, family support and therapeutic care interventions.

Arising from the Government's consideration and decision with regard to the functions of the new Agency it has been agreed by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and the Department of Health that an impact analysis will be jointly developed of the proposed future arrangements for the provision of the community psychology service as it relates to children and family services covered by the Child and Family Support Agency and to services provided by the HSE. This work will be undertaken as a priority.

I recently met with representatives from the Heads of the Psychology Services Ireland and with a delegation from the IMPACT trade union to discuss issues relating to the future governance and organisational arrangements for the provision of community based psychology services. Our shared objective is to ensure that the optimal national governance and service delivery framework is in place to ensure the best possible outcomes for children and families and other clients who need to avail of this key service. The views of the profession and its representatives will receive appropriate consideration as part of the impact analysis.

Budget Targets

276. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide an analysis of the €308 million of pay related savings in his Department's budget in 2013; and if he will set out the way such savings estimates were validated by his Department. [57390/12]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): A total of €308m in pay-related savings has been targeted for the health services in 2013. These savings will be achieved under three separate headings: firstly, by intensifying the implementation of the Public Service Agreement within the health services, secondly, through the negotiation of an agreement on further work-place change and savings with public sector unions, as has been proposed by Government, and thirdly, through further reductions in staffing in 2013.

Required measures under the PSA and included in the recently-revised sectorial plan for Health include new rosters in hospitals, changes in skill mix in nursing homes, the implementation of the recent agreement reached with Hospital Consultants, a significant reduction in overtime and agency spending and a reduction in management grades.

The Government has initiated discussions with the Trade Unions on a new agenda for improvements in the productivity of public servants and reductions in the cost of delivery of public services. Detailed engagement is expected to commence early in 2013, under the leadership of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

Implementation of the PSA is overseen by the national-level Implementation Body. Each sector is required to provide periodic reports to the Implementation Body and this arrangement will continue in respect of measures to be implemented in 2013.

Budget Targets

277. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide the underlying workings in support of the €60 million savings on Department vote in his Department's 2013 budget; and if he will set out the way such savings estimates were validated by his Department. [57391/12]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The adjustments to the Department of Health Vote, Vote 38, are set out in the Budget book published recently and available on the website of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

The Department of Health Vote is being reduced by €90m. This arises from a range of measures. Even allowing for additional expenditure related to the EU Presidency, there will be a reduction in the Department's Administrative Budget. There will be savings on the National Treatment Purchase Fund and €25m of its budget will be transferred to the HSE for use in an Intervention Fund. There will also be a range of further reductions, including a reduction in funding to health agencies.

Budget Targets

278. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide the underlying workings in support of the €160 million reduction in cost of drugs and other prescribed items in his Department budget for 2013; and if he will set out the way such savings estimates were validated by his Department. [57392/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): Due to the very difficult and challenging economic environment, the Government has committed to achieving additional savings of €160 in expenditure on drugs and medicines in 2013 as set out in the following table:

Primary Care Scheme	Savings and Target
IPHA/APMI Agreement on Drug Price Reductions	€120 million
Quality Prescribing Initiative	€20 million
Reduce price of oral nutritional supplements	€5 million
Delisting products from GMS scheme	€15 million

Special Educational Needs Staffing

279. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health his views on whether the optimal situation for children in special schools is the provision of multi-disciplinary teams involving teachers, allied health professionals such as physios, occupational therapists and speech and language therapists, in the school setting ensuring correct synergies across all disciplines, consistency over time in attending the needs of the child and ensuring a truly holistic approach to the child's development; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57500/12]

297. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health if he will suspend the implementation of the Health Service Executive's programme for progressing disability services for children and young people in view of the fact that it is causing undue anxiety to parents of children with special needs particularly in Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57497/12]

298. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health if he will ensure that the Health Service Executive's Programme for progressing disability services for children and young persons will not lead to a reduction of allied health professional staff in special schools and that the existing complement will be retained and enhanced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57499/12]

Minister for Health(Deputy James Reilly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 279, 297 and 298 together.

The HSE has recognised the need to increase the level of consistency and standardisation in the way both early intervention services and services for school-aged children with disabilities are delivered. It is currently engaged in a reconfiguration of existing therapy resources to geographic based teams for children (0-18 years) as part of the National Programme on Progressing Disability Services for Children and Young People (0-18 years).

The Programme is organised at national, regional and local level and includes representatives from the health and education sectors, service providers (both statutory and non-statutory) and parents. These stakeholders are working together to see how current services can be reorganised in line with agreed policy. The HSE has stated that it is very cognisant of stakeholder's views particularly of parents within this context. It has also worked to ensure that information about the Programme is made widely available.

The Executive is working very closely with the education sector, which is fully involved in the development of the Programme, to ensure that, from the children's and parents' perspective, the services provided by each sector in so far as possible are integrated. Detailed Local Area action plans are being implemented with the following objectives: one clear pathway to services

for all children with disabilities according to need; resources used to the greatest benefit for all children and families, and health and education working together to support children to achieve their potential.

The purpose of the reconfiguration of existing therapy resources is to ensure that the resources available are used to best effect, in order to provide health supports and ongoing therapy to all children (0-18 years) in line with their prioritised needs. In particular, it will mean that all children, regardless of where they receive their education services will have equitable access to services based on their needs.

While the HSE supports the principle of providing access to mainstream education where appropriate, the Programme recognises the important continuing role of special schools. In this context, the HSE envisages that children attending special needs primary schools will have access to health supports and therapy services based on their needs. The Department of Education and Skills is a partner in this programme and an Education and Health working group comprised of representatives from both sectors is developing a framework for closer working relationships.

Decisions in relation to the local reorganisation of services will be made by Local Implementation Groups, which include representatives of all the service providers in the local area, parents and the education sector. They have a complex task which includes agreeing the principles which should underpin all disability services, mapping of existing services and gaps, consideration of the changes needed in structures and a detailed plan of how to advance. This plan will include issues of timing and the phasing of proposed changes.

My Department has asked the HSE to provide the Deputy with detailed information on the implementation of the Programme in Cork which he has referred to in his question.

General Medical Services Scheme Payments

280. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Health his views regarding charges by certain doctors for medical examinations and subsequent reports (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57539/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): Under the General Medical Services (GMS) contract, a general practitioner (GP) is expected to provide his/her patients who hold medical cards or GP visit cards with all proper and necessary treatment of a kind generally undertaken by a GP.

The contract between the HSE and GPs under the GMS Scheme stipulates that fees are not paid to GPs by the HSE in respect of certain medical certificates which may be required, for example, "under the Social Welfare Acts or for the purposes of insurance or assurance policies or for the issue of driving licences".

Consultation fees charged by general practitioners to private patients and to GMS patients outside the terms of the GMS contract are a matter of private contract between the clinicians and the patients. While I have no role in relation to such fees, I would expect clinicians to have regard to the overall economic situation in setting their fees. I should add that General Practitioners who hold GMS contracts with the HSE must not seek or accept money from medical card or GP visit card holders in respect of routine treatment.

Services for People with Disabilities

281. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the reason the assesment of needs in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Cork as laid down in the Disability Act of 2005 has not been met eight months after the application; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57381/12]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): 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.

Services for People with Disabilities

282. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide in tabular form a breakdown of the waiting lists for assessment of needs under the Disability Act 2005 by county.; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57382/12]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Health Services Provision

283. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if the Health Service Executive plan to appoint an ophthalmologist for the Longford-Westmeath area. [57399/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): The HSE has therefore been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Regulatory Bodies

284. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Health the basis on which a registration fee of €295 was deemed appropriate for social workers; if he has given consideration to charging a registration fee on a par with that paid by other professional groups such as nurses and teachers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57401/12]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): Under the provisions of the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005, there is a two-year transitional period from the date on which the register of the members of that profession is established, during which existing practitioners may apply for registration.

The Health and Social care Professionals Council (the Council) is an independent statutory body and is responsible for setting the level of fees.

The Council has set the following fee structure: a registration fee of €100 for new graduates, who have obtained recognised professional qualifications within two years of applying for registration; an annual retention fee of €295 for registrants, including those who paid the lower rate on graduation, is payable on the annual renewal date.

All health regulators are self funding by way of annual fee income with operational costs be-

ing determined by the complexity and breadth of statutory functions specified in its legislation. The greater the registrant base the lower the annual fee charged. Given the enormous registrant base in teaching and nursing, for example, the annual fee charged amounts to less than €100 per annum. Health regulators are single profession regulators whereas the Council is charged with regulating twelve disparate professions, which can add significantly to operating costs. The twelve designated professions to be registered by the Council range in number from under 50 Clinical Biochemists to 5,550 Social Care Workers, which amounts to about 20,000 registrants in total across all professions. This is an extremely low registrant base when compared to a registrant base of well in excess of 60,000 for nurses.

The Council has extensive statutory functions under the 2005 Act, and considers the annual fee of €295 the minimum required to enable it to operate. The fee charged by the Council, which takes account of the requirement to become self funding by end 2015, is on a par with that charged by other health regulators and less than some in certain cases. The State is currently funding the Council in its establishment phase (€1.937 million in 2012) to offset the current shortfall in income from registration fees and will continue to do so on a reducing basis for the next 3 years.

In response to concerns about the level of fee, the Council has reviewed the regulatory structure to establish what scope exists for controlling registration fees and operational costs and has adopted the following measures: where an existing practitioner with the necessary experience and recognised professional qualifications, or equivalent, pays the registration fee of €295 and is granted registration during the transitional period, also known as grandparenting, the application fee will cover them for the remainder of the grandparenting period and one full year of retention of registration after expiration of grandparenting. This concession will only apply to existing practitioners availing of the transitional provisions set out in the Act; the Council has entered into discussions with the HSE in regard to the feasibility of arrangements for the deduction of the registration fee from monthly salary thereby spreading the cost throughout the year; finally, the Council has proposed significant restructuring of the way in which the designated professions will be registered and regulated to provide a more cost effective operating system and keep costs to a minimum. This will require the enactment of primary legislation in due course.

Health Services Provision

285. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Health the supports his Department provides in relation to fertility treatment; his plans for the future regarding same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57404/12]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): Assisted Human Reproduction treatment (AHR) is not provided or funded by the public health system; such treatment is available from clinics that operate privately. Patients who access these services privately may claim tax relief on the costs involved under the tax relief for medical expenses scheme.

In addition, a defined list of fertility medicines needed for fertility treatment is covered under the High Tech Scheme administered by the Health Service Executive. Medicines covered by the High Tech Scheme must be prescribed by a consultant/specialist and authorised by the 'High Tech Liaison Officers'. The cost of the medicines are reflected in the PCRS Statistical Analysis of Claims and Payments under the High Tech Drugs. The patient uses their valid established eligibility of GMS or DPS as appropriate to access the medicines.

I am conscious of the financial burden that fertility services can place on the couples con-

cerned; however, this matter has to be considered in the context of the difficult economic situation that prevails and the other compelling funding demands across a full range of health issues.

Hospital Procedures

286. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Health if he will put in place the necessary resources to carry out surgery in respect of a person (details supplied). [57406/12]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): As previously advised to the Deputy, in relation to the specific issue raised by him, as this is a service issue it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Hospice Services

287. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health if he will ensure that there are no cuts to the budget for a hospice (details supplied) in Dublin 5; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57420/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The level of funding available for the health budget, and the extent of savings required in the health sector, is being considered as part of finalising the HSE Service Plan 2013. The allocation of funding across care groups, including Palliative Care, will therefore be agreed in this context.

As was the case in previous years, the Health Service Executive has engaged with voluntary providers, including individual Hospices, to discuss service levels in 2013 in line with resources available. Nonetheless, despite the severe financial challenges facing the Exchequer, every effort will be made to protect front-line services, including Hospice care.

HSE Staff Responsibilities

288. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health if it is the case that the Health Service Executive intends to recruit 35 leadership/motivational coaches for HSE managers (details supplied); if he will outline the purpose, role and terms of contract of same; if he will detail the cost of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57427/12]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The HSE will be undergoing radical reform in the coming years. Strong leadership and management in the health service will be of crucial importance in order to deliver on reforms and changes of this scale. As a result, the HSE is implementing a Succession Management Programme in order to strengthen management capacity.

It is anticipated that most executive coaching requirements will be delivered by qualified HSE staff. However, some additional coaching capacity is required and the HSE has tendered for such services on a regional basis. As this tendering process a matter for the HSE in the first instance, I have referred the Deputy's question to the HSE for a more detailed response.

Departmental Agencies Issues

289. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the delay experienced by a person (details supplied) in attempting to register as a nurse with An Bord

Altranais in view of the fact that the person has been attempting to register since 2012; if there is a backlog of cases; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57431/12]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The information regarding Nurse Registration is a matter for the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland (formerly An Board Altranais). I have forwarded your request to the Board for direct response.

Hospital Complaints

290. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health his response to a complaint regarding the care of a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny; if he has investigated this complaint; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57432/12]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): I have asked the HSE to reply directly to the Deputy in this matter. With regard to specific complaints, a formal complaints policy exists, details of which are available on the HSE website: www.hse.ie. In addition, advice and instructions for making complaints about a service or an individual may be found at the website: www.healthcomplaints.ie. In accordance with this procedure, a complaint should be made in the first instance to the hospital in which the incident causing the complaint occurred. If an individual is not satisfied with the response from the hospital, a review can be sought from the HSE Director of Advocacy, Oak House, Millennium Park, Naas, Co. Kildare, or the Office of the Ombudsman, 18 Lower Leeson Street, Dublin 2.

Primary Care Centres Provision

291. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the steps he has taken in the past six months to progress the development of the two new primary care centres in Coolock, Edemore, Raheny and Darndale, Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57440/12]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): Progress is being made in the delivery of primary care infrastructure. With regard to the PPP initiative for primary care infrastructure, the current position is that the HSE is engaging with the NDFA as required to progress the programme. The HSE is currently analysing the available sites in each location and engaging with the GPs in each location to determine their interest in participating in the primary care centre development. The HSE has commenced the procurement of design teams and technical advisors to progress the design and planning submissions for the primary care centre sites, and the preparation of the PPP procurement documents. Coolock and Darndale were announced as potential locations for primary care centres in the July 2012 PPP Stimulus Package. Up to 20 of the 35 locations announced will be offered to the market subject to a) agreement between the local GPs and the HSE on active local GP involvement in the centres and b) site suitability and availability.

The method and timescale for the delivery of primary care infrastructure is dependent on a number of factors; it is a dynamic process constantly evolving to take account of changing circumstances, including the feasibility of implementation.

There are always more construction projects than can be funded from the Exchequer's capital health care allocation. The Executive is required to prioritise infrastructure projects within its overall capital envelope taking into account the existing capital commitments and costs of completion over the period. Work is underway on the Executive's multi-annual Capital Plan

2013-2017. The draft Plan will be submitted to my Department in due course. My Department will then review the proposals and follow up with the HSE where further details may be required. The draft Capital Plan 2013-2017 will require my approval with the consent of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform.

HSE Funding

292. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the budget deficit for Beaumont Hospital, Dublin 9, at the end of each month to date in 2012; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57441/12]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): In relation to the particular issue raised by the Deputy, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy in this matter.

Patient Transport Expenditure

293. **Deputy Liam Twomey** asked the Minister for Health the reason a private ambulance was called to transfer a patient from Waterford Regional Hospital at a cost of €900, when a wheelchair taxi at a cost of €120 was satisfactory; the cost controls the VHI are implementing to control this unnecessary cost on VHI subscribers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57454/12]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): As Minister for Health, I have no role in the day to day decisions of the private health insurance companies. VHI Healthcare provides benefit for ambulance transfers in certain specified circumstances. A clinical decision is taken in each individual case, a hospital clinician certifies on the claim form that it is medically necessary for the patient to be transported by ambulance and details the medical reason why such ambulance transportation is necessary. Ambulance benefit is payable to ambulance companies on receipt of a fully completed claim form.

The Deputy may wish to note that the VHI Special Investigation Unit works to ensure that instances of error or overcharging by healthcare providers are fully investigated and rectified and the Deputy may wish to pass on the details to the VHI for further investigation.

Medical Card Delays

294. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghaíl** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite the renewal of a medical card in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57465/12]

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.

HSE Staff Remuneration

295. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Health if he is satisfied that all outstanding moneys have been paid to a retired Health Service Executive employee (details supplied) in

County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57466/12]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The payment of holiday pay is a matter for the Health Service Executive, and as such, the Deputy's enquiry has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

National Lottery Funding Applications

296. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health if a service for a resource centre (details supplied) in County Kerry will be funded; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57475/12]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): My Department has received an application for funding from the 2012 National Lottery allocation from the organisation in question. This is one of a large number currently being assessed by my Department, and the Deputy will be informed of the outcome of the application as soon as a decision has been made.

Questions Nos. 297 and 298 answered with Question No. 279.

Health Services Staff Issues

299. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Health if he will appoint additional psychologists to address the waiting lists for children with autism in County Kerry, particularly for children in the age bracket of six years and over who are waiting the longest; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57507/12]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): 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.

EU Directives

300. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health in view of the implementation of the EU Directive 2010/63/EU in January 2013, the way he intends to implement the three Rs, replacement of the use of animals to the greatest extent possible with alternative testing methods, refinement of scientific procedures to improve animal welfare and reduction in numbers of animals used; the way he will address the issue of animals subjected to severe pain, suffering and distress which a significant proportion of Irish animal experiments officially cause; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57514/12]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): I can confirm that Directive 2010/63/EU on the protection of animals used for scientific purposes will be transposed into Irish law during December and the new Directive, which will considerably strengthen the protection of animals still needed for research and safety testing, will take effect from 1 January, 2013.

Significant changes that are provided for in the transposition of this Directive include a requirement to perform detailed project evaluations prior to authorisation of projects using animals and higher standards of animal care, welfare and accommodation. The Directive will also play a significant role in minimising the number of animals used and requires that alternatives to animal testing be used where possible, whilst ensuring a level playing field for EU industry

and enhancing the quality of research conducted in the EU.

The Directive also strongly promotes the principles of the three R's (replacement of the use of animals to the greatest extent possible with alternative testing methods, refinement of scientific procedures to improve animal welfare, and reduction in numbers of animals used). It should be noted that many of the provisions set out in Directive 2010/63/EU are mandatory. The European Environment Commissioner affirmed that the European Union will, once the Directive is transposed, have the highest standards of experimental animal welfare in the world.

In transposing the Directive I have decided not to transpose Article 42 which provides for a simplified administrative procedure for certain types of projects. My decision in this regard is based on my determination to ensure a high level of protection for all animals that still need to be used for scientific purposes. A simplified procedure along the lines of Article 42 would, in effect, have introduced a two-tiered system, one requiring full project authorisation and another which would undermine that authorisation system. As a consequence of my decision not to introduce any such simplified system all projects using animals for scientific purposes will be subject to the full project approval and authorisation requirements set out in the Directive.

The approval of projects and of key individuals involved in those projects and of the establishments where they are carried out will be a matter for the Irish Medicines Board (IMB) which I have designated as the Competent Authority (CA) for the purposes of the Directive. My decision to assign CA functions to the IMB takes into account the fact that replacement and refinement of experimental studies to minimise the use of animals is a central tenet of the Directive. This will require an up-to-date knowledge of such alternative methods and tests as well as the authority to require the use of such alternatives, where possible, by those currently using animals. This work will also require the employment of persons with veterinary expertise specialising in laboratory animal welfare to evaluate scientific projects and to oversee compliance with Directive requirements. Such specialists will also be expected to be able to offer detailed regulatory advice to those involved in the industry. The IMB has the relevant expertise in relation to both human and veterinary medicine to assist it in undertaking this regulatory work and in ensuring that the three R's will remain central to this area of work in the years ahead.

I should also point out that any project involving severe pain or suffering will be automatically subject to a full retrospective assessment by the competent authority. It will also be open to the IMB to retrospectively assess any other project carried out under this Directive. Significant enforcement powers have been included in the transposing statutory instrument to enable the IMB to examine any possible breaches of the legislation and the transposition also provides for significant penalties where serious infringements are identified.

Home Help Service Eligibility

301. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Health the criteria used for assessing those in receipt of home help hours. [57517/12]

302. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Health the total number of home help appeals received in each area in the past month; the length of time it is taking for the appeals to be reviewed and the time frame involved to have the current back log reviewed. [57518/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): I propose to take Questions Nos. 301 and 302 together.

As these are service matters they have been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

National Positive Ageing Strategy Publication

303. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health when the National Positive Aging Strategy will be presented to Cabinet and published in view of a recent commitment to publish before end 2012 and numerous previous commitments to present it to Cabinet and publish it in 2012; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57520/12]

304. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health his views on whether the failure to publish the National Positive Aging Strategy is resulting in poor policy decisions being taken across Departments that negatively impact upon older people; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57521/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): I propose to take Questions Nos. 303 and 304 together.

The Programme for Government has committed to completing and implementing the National Positive Ageing Strategy so that older people are recognised, supported and enabled to live independent full lives.

The Strategy will be a high level document outlining Ireland's vision for ageing and older people and the national goals and objectives required to promote positive ageing. It will be an over-arching cross-departmental policy and implementation framework that will be the blueprint for age related policy and service delivery across Government in the years ahead.

It will set out a common framework for the development of operational plans by a number of Government Departments, which will clearly set out their objectives relating to older people. Mechanisms designed to monitor the implementation of measures contained in operational plans will also be outlined in the Strategy.

The intention of the Strategy is not to propose new service developments and it will not be prescriptive in relation to the specific actions that will be taken by individual Government Departments to promote positive ageing. Rather, it will set the strategic direction for Government policy on ageing into the future by outlining the priority areas requiring action.

A considerable amount of preparatory work has already been completed and consultations with other Departments are ongoing. The drafting of the Strategy will proceed within the Department within the constraints of available staff and other priorities.

Hospital Services

305. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Health his plans for the future of Belmullet Community Hospital, County Mayo; if his attention has been drawn to the role the hospital plays in the overall framework in County Mayo and in particular its role in assisting bed management at Mayo General Hospital; if he will consider designating it as an intermediate care facility; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57542/12]

306. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the x-ray service at Belmullet Community Hospital, County Mayo, is currently suspended; if the Health Service Executive plans reinstate the service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57543/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): I propose to take Questions Nos. 305 and 306 together.

As these are service matters they have been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

General Medical Services Scheme Administration

307. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Health if he plans to bring forward proposals to standardise the cost structure for blood tests in respect of those patients on general practitioner visit and medical cards; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57558/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): Section 11 of the General Medical Services (GMS) GP Capitation Contract, which was introduced in 1989, provides that the medical practitioner shall provide for eligible persons, on behalf of the Health rvice Executive (HSE), all proper and necessary treatment of a kind usually undertaken by a general practitioner (GP) and not requiring special skill or experience of a degree or kind which GPs cannot reasonably be expected to possess.

GPs who hold GMS contracts with the HSE must not seek or accept money from medical card or GP visit card holders for services covered under the GMS contract. In circumstances where the taking of blood is necessary to either: (a) assist in the process of diagnosing a patient; or (b) monitor a diagnosed condition the GP may not charge the patient if they are eligible for free GMS services.

The Programme for Government provides for the introduction of a new GMS GP contract with an increased emphasis on the management of chronic conditions, such as diabetes and cardiovascular conditions. It is envisaged that the new contract, when finalised, will focus on prevention and will include a requirement for GPs to provide care as part of integrated multi-disciplinary Primary Care Teams. Officials in the Department are in consultation with the HSE with a view to drawing up a new contract. The appropriate arrangements in relation to phlebotomy services and other such services will be considered as part of the new contract.

Alcohol Pricing

308. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Health when the alcohol pricing proposals relating to the sale of alcohol at below cost prices will be brought before Dáil Éireann; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57559/12]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): Real and tangible proposals are currently being finalized on foot of the recommendations in the Substance Misuse report. I intend to submit these proposals to the Government for consideration and approval as soon as possible. These proposals cover all of the areas mentioned in the report, including: legislation on minimum unit pricing which is about setting a statutory floor price per gram of alcohol; access and availability of alcohol - including of course structural separation in retail units where alcohol is sold; and advertising and sponsorship.

My officials and I are in continuing discussions with the Departments of Justice & Equality; Transport, Tourism & Sport; Communications, Energy & Natural Resources; Arts, Heritage & Gaeltacht Affairs; and Agriculture, Marine & Food on various aspects of the proposals. I therefore expect to make progress on this important area early in the new year when the proposals will be brought to Government. In the meantime, work by my officials on developing a framework for the necessary Department of Health legislation governing, among others, minimum unit pricing, is continuing.

For example, in conjunction with Northern Ireland, a health impact assessment is being commissioned as part of the process of developing a legislative basis for minimum unit pricing. The health impact assessment will study the impact of different minimum prices on a range of areas such as health, crime and likely economic impact.

Hospital Staff Issues

309. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding a urologist for Temple Street Hospital, Dublin (details supplied) [57568/12]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The Children's University Hospital, Temple Street is the national tertiary care centre for Spina Bifida and hydrocephalus. All infants born in Ireland with Spina Bifida are transferred to Temple Street after birth for ongoing neonatal management.

A multi-disciplinary Spina Bifida clinic was established in Temple Street in February 2011. A recruitment process was underway in 2009/2010 from which the Hospital hoped to recruit a urologist, but unfortunately that recruitment process found no suitable candidate for the post. However, approval has been given by the HSE to recruit a Consultant Urologist and it is hoped that this post will be advertised before year end. The HSE are hopeful that this new recruitment process will succeed in hiring a suitable candidate.

Children requiring urgent urological input are prioritised clinically and seen in the UK under the Treatment Abroad Scheme. Where patients have been refused under the Treatment Abroad Scheme, the hospital is currently in final negotiations with St Georges Hospital in London with a view to having the hospital treat these children, pending the appointment of a permanent urologist. Arrangements are currently being made to have a consultant visit from the UK to cover clinical priorities here. This Government is acutely aware of the challenges that patients with Spina bifida and their families face in managing their condition. I am committed to providing the best possible health service and will continue to work with the HSE to ensure the best possible outcomes for these patients.

Health Services Provision

310. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health if he will review the lack of services and supports relative to the care of a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny; if the staff/client ratio at the centre is adequate; if the clients needs and activity programme are all being met; if some nurses have acquired a class D licence as committed to in Health Service Executive correspondence of 18 May 2012; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57571/12]

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

HSE Funding

311. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding funding in respect of an organisation (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57573/12]

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.

Medical Card Appeals

312. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghaíl** asked the Minister for Health if a review of a medical card application will be carried out in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57574/12]

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.

Health Services Provision

313. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health the steps he is taking to integrate access to and use of blood results both in primary care and acute hospitals; the estimated saving of such a system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57578/12]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): In relation to the specific query raised by the Deputy, as this is a service issue it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Health and Safety Regulations

314. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the regulation for sunbed use here; the regulations in place at present and the plans for reform; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57579/12]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The Deputy will be aware that there is growing evidence over recent years that sunbed use, especially by children, should be restricted because of the associated increased risk of skin cancer and other health problems.

Currently, there are no statutory regulations governing sunbed use. There are, however, regulations governing the product safety aspects of sunbed appliances which are enforced by the National Consumer Agency.

The Government has given its approval to the drafting of the Public Health (Sunbeds) Bill by the Office of the Attorney General. It is proposed to prohibit sunbed use by persons under 18 years of age and to promote a greater public awareness across all age groups of the dangers of developing skin cancer, premature ageing and eye damage from exposure to ultraviolet radiation (UVR). Key provisions proposed for inclusion in the Bill are:

(i) a prohibition on operators of sunbed premises from allowing anyone under 18 years of age to use a sunbed on their premises;

(ii) a prohibition on the sale to or hire of sunbeds to anyone under 18 years of age;

(iii) an exemption for medical treatment to be provided;

(iv) a prohibition on the use of sunbeds in unsupervised commercial premises;

(v) control on the remote sale or hire of sunbeds (internet transactions);

(vi) a requirement that sunbed operators provide training for staff;

(vii) an enforcement regime and the imposition of penalties for non-compliance;

(viii) an obligation on all sunbed operators to provide protective eyewear;

(ix) a requirement that warning signs be displayed in all sunbed premises;

(x) a prohibition on promotional marketing practices; and

(xi) a requirement on operators to ensure that sunbed users are made fully aware of the potential dangers of sunbed use.

My Department is currently working with the Office of the Attorney General on this legislation. The Bill, when drafted, will need to be notified to the EU Commission under the Technical Standards Directive prior to its publication.

Medical Card Delays

315. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health the current processing time for medical cards and appeals; the number of persons in each county in receipt of a medical card and general practitioner card, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57581/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): The current processing time for medical cards applications and appeals is 96.05% within 15 days as at 3rd December 2012.

I have referred the remaining elements of the Deputy's question to the HSE for direct reply to the Deputy.

Misuse of Drugs

316. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health when he expects the misuse of drugs legislation to be updated to tackle the street sale of Benzodiazepines; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57582/12]

317. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health the current cost of Benzodiazepines prescribing to the GMS system; the steps being taken to address over prescribing; the estimated cost to the GMS system of over prescribing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57583/12]

319. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 146 of 21 September 2012, if he will furnish the data promised; if he will provide current figures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57590/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): I propose to take Questions Nos. 316, 317 and 319 together.

Benzodiazepines, as a group of medicines, are commonly used to treat anxiety, sleep disturbance and insomnia. Benzodiazepines are known to be associated with dependence and with-

drawal symptoms and consequently are primarily recommended for short-term treatment only. There is increasing evidence of the inappropriate use of benzodiazepines in Ireland.

The 'Z drugs' are a group of medicines (zopiclone, zolpidem and zaleplon) which are used to treat insomnia. They have a shorter duration of action than benzodiazepines. However, there are increasing reports of dependence and misuse of these substances also.

Overuse of benzodiazepines is an international issue and not specific to Ireland. The International Narcotics Control Board 2009 statistics show that Europe has the highest average consumption of benzodiazepines internationally. In its 2009 Report the INCB noted that it has observed a growing international problem of abuse of prescription medicines, including opiates, benzodiazepines and codeine.

My Department is reviewing the Misuse of Drugs Regulations with a view to, amongst other issues, introducing additional controls on certain prescription drugs being traded illicitly, including benzodiazepine medicines.

My Department has consulted with key stakeholders in relation to the proposed amendments, which include introducing import and export controls as well as an offence of possession, thereby assisting the law enforcement roles of Customs and of the Garda Siochána. It is anticipated that new legislation will be introduced in early 2013. The Health Service Executive is responsible for the administration of the GMS scheme and the cost of benzodiazepine prescribing within that scheme. The HSE has therefore been asked to examine this matter and I will revert to the Deputy as soon as possible with this information.

Health Services Provision

318. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health the number of specific stroke units within the health system; the incidence of stroke; the number of rehabilitative consultants employed here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57586/12]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The HSE National Clinical Care Programmes provide a national, strategic and co-ordinated approach to a wide range of clinical services. They have three main objectives – to improve the quality of care, to improve access and to improve cost-effectiveness. The primary aim is to modernise the way hospital services are provided across a wide range of clinical areas. This is being done through standardising access to and delivery of high quality, safe and efficient hospital services, and maximising linkages to primary care and other community services. Currently there are a number of Clinical Care Programmes in different stages of development/implementation including a Stroke Programme.

In relation to the specific query raised by the Deputy, as this is a service matter, it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Question No. 319 answered with Question No. 316.

Medical Records

320. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health if the medical records of a person (details supplied) in County Laois regarding all their treatment in Portlaoise General Hospital will be made available to them; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57608/12]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): It is not possible to comment on the release of specific records. Each case must be dealt with individually and each officer making a decision whether to release, not release or partially release records must make the decision based on the specific record set and specific relevant circumstances.

In general, the Freedom of Information Acts 1997 and 2003 enable an individual to request access to records held by a public body as named in the schedule to the legislation. Access may be granted subject to conditions set out in the legislation. For personal records, as this case would seem to involve, there is no fee for an individual seeking access to their own records, although there may be administrative charges. In the case of medical records, an individual requesting access to their medical records may be asked to nominate a health professional to whom the records will be released in the first instance. This nominated individual should have the expertise to interpret and explain the records to the requester.

Similarly, the Data Protection Acts, 1988 and 2003 provide for access to personal information, again subject to conditions in the legislation. This legislation, however, concerns itself more with protection of data and the length of time that data can be held.

An individual record holder, in this case Portlaoise General Hospital, is responsible for the maintenance of its own records and for decisions in relation to release, non-release or partial release of those records. In all cases, reasons for a decision not to release or to partially release must accompany the decision.

In 2007, the HSE published a National Code of Practice for Healthcare Records Management, providing guidelines for hospitals in relation to the management of their healthcare records. This code of practice can be accessed on line at:http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/Publications/services/Hospitals/NHO_Code_of_Practice_for_Healthcare_Records_Management_Version_2_0.pdf.

In relation to the specific query raised by the Deputy, as this is a service matter, it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Hospital Services

321. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the proposal to provide a Medical Assessment Unit at Monaghan General Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57628/12]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): In relation to this particular issue, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy in this matter.

Nursing Home Services

322. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health the efforts he has made, since his meeting in Dingle, County Kerry, with representatives of Valentia Community Hospital last February, to help ensure the bodies affecting its future would work to help secure its future; the effort he is willing to make at this juncture; his views on whether it would be useful for the Health Service Executive, National Treatment Purchase Fund and his Department to meet collectively with representatives of the hospital; if he will encourage such a meeting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57632/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): Officials from

the Department of Health met with representatives from both the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) and the HSE on the 21st March to discuss the issue of nursing homes, including Valentia Hospital, which received funding for long-term residential care services under Section 39 of the Health Act 2004 prior to the commencement of the Nursing Homes Support Scheme.

As the Deputy is aware, the outcome of this meeting was that the NTPF undertook to tender for a forensic accounting service to support it in its role of negotiating prices with private and voluntary nursing homes under Section 40 of the Nursing Homes Support Scheme Act 2009. This would include an assignment to provide factual input to an NTPF review of section 39 nursing homes, including Valentia Hospital.

Following the appointment of the forensic accountants, a review of the section 39 nursing homes was carried out. I understand that, in the case of Valentia Hospital, the NTPF offered an increase to the rate following the review. This offer was rejected, however, I understand that the NTPF remains open to negotiations with Valentia Hospital.

With regard to the question of a meeting between the Department, the HSE, the NTPF and Valentia Hospital, I do not consider that this would be appropriate. The NTPF is independent in the performance of its function under Section 40 of the Nursing Homes Support Scheme Act 2009 and, in carrying it out, must ensure value for money for both nursing home residents and the State.

Health Services Provision

323. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health the current provision of therapeutic apheresis services here; the role of the Irish Blood Transfusion Services in the delivery of same; if these services will continue to be provided by the IBTS in 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57634/12]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): A number of hospitals provide a Therapeutic Apheresis Service and the Irish Blood Transfusion Service (IBTS) provides an outreach service to a number of hospitals in Dublin and Cork. However, due to its inability to recruit or retain sufficient numbers of staff to meet service demands, the IBTS has informed the HSE that it will cease to provide this service in Dublin from 31 December 2012. All affected hospitals have also been informed and plans are underway in these hospitals for alternative provision of the service.

Hospital Charges

324. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health if it is the case that, due to changes in Section 53 and 72 of the Health Act 1970 as amended by the Health (Amendment) Act 2005, charges may be applied for in-patient services for people with disabilities, and that a maximum weekly charge of €175 applies; if this will be the case at a care facility (details supplied) in County Meath from January 2013; if he will confirm that this is a new charge and if he will outline all other services and facilities that will implement this charge from January 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57636/12]

325. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health when the Health Charges for In-Patient Services Amendment Regulations 2011 came into effect; if he will outline the extent of its implementation; the services and facilities to which it applies; if he will provide a breakdown of same by the Health Service Executive region and in tabular form; if its application will be extended in 2013 and details of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[57637/12]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 324 and 325 together.

Charges for long-stay in-patient services were provided for under the Health (Amendment) Act 2005 and came into effect on 15 July 2005 under the subsequent Health (Charges for In-Patient Services) Regulations 2005. These Regulations have been amended on a number of occasions since then, most recently by the Health (Charges for In-patient Services) (Amendment) Regulations 2011, which came into effect on 23 July 2011.

The Act provides that the maximum weekly charge cannot exceed 80% of the maximum rate of the weekly State Pension (non-contributory). The Regulations made under the Act provide for two different classes of charges:

- Class 1- charges for those receiving in-patient services on premises where 24 hour nursing care is provided are based on income (subject to a current maximum of €175 per week) and

- Class 2- charges for those receiving in-patient services on premises where 24 hour nursing care is not provided are based on income (subject to a current maximum of €130 per week).

The maximum charge applicable since July 2011 for Class 1 (€175.00) represents just under 80% of the weekly State Pension (non-contributory) while the maximum rate for Class 2 (€130.00) represents almost 60%. These charges are structured to ensure that those paying charges retain a minimum income for personal use i.e. at least €33 per week for those paying Class 1 rates and at least €64 per week for those paying Class 2 rates.

A person in receipt of Disability Allowance at the current maximum rate of €188 p.w. would be liable, subject to a financial assessment, to a maximum charge under Class 1 of €155 p.w. and under Class 2 of €120 p.w.

Section 53(4) of the Health Act 1970 provides that the HSE may reduce or waive a charge imposed on a person in order to avoid undue financial hardship to that person. To assist in the fair application of the provisions of the Act and the related Regulations, the HSE has developed national guidelines for the determination and levying of charges for in-patient services, which include the need to have regard to the income of the person, the provisions of the Regulations and the patient's individual circumstances.

Subject to exceptions specified in the Act, charges are applicable to the maintenance element of in-patient services provided to a person under section 52 of the Health Act 1970 for a period of over 30 consecutive days (or an aggregate period of over 30 days during the preceding 12 months). Among the exclusions from these charges are persons who are subject to the provisions of the Nursing Homes Support Scheme Act 2009 ("the Fair Deal") and those in acute hospitals who require medically acute care and treatment.

The facilities to which the charges apply include all hospitals, convalescent homes and homes for persons suffering from physical or mental disability in which the HSE delivers, or arranges for the delivery of, in-patient services. I understand that the HSE at present arranges for and funds the delivery of services, including long-stay residential in-patient services, to a number of individuals in the facility referred to in the question.

The HSE is required under the 2005 Act to levy the appropriate charges on individuals in receipt of in-patient services, subject to any relevant exemptions, waivers or reductions provided for in the Act and the Regulations. The funding derived from these charges is directly applied by the HSE towards the provision of health services. Provision of quality public long term care

is expensive and it is fair and equitable that those in receipt of such care should pay towards its cost in accordance with their means.

There are no proposals to extend the application of the Act or related Regulations from January 2013.

Medical Card Applications

326. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health when a medical card will issue in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57642/12]

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.

HSE Expenditure

327. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Health if he will outline the amount the Health Service Executive paid for taxi services in County Donegal since the patient bus service between Letterkenny and Dublin was abolished in July 2012; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57676/12]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): In relation to this particular issue, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy in this matter.

Food Safety Standards Inspections

328. **Deputy Heather Humphreys** asked the Minister for Health if he will confirm that poultry used in meals for hospitals is Bord Bia quality assured; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57680/12]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): In relation to this particular issue, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy in this matter.

Health Promotion Issues

329. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Health if he will investigate the regulating of the salt content in foods in view of the fact that medical experts say it would help reduce the number of high blood pressure fatalities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57684/12]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): High salt intake is implicated in the development of high blood pressure and in my Department's National Cardiovascular Health Policy we have set a salt consumption target to reduce salt intake to the recommended 6 grams per day for adults by 2019.

To help achieve this we are participating in the EU Salt Reduction Framework which focuses on the reformulation of everyday foods that are the key providers of salt in the Irish diet.

The Food Safety Authority of Ireland have a salt reduction initiative in place since 2004 and have worked with major Irish food companies towards receiving the 16% reduction target recommended by the EU Framework.

Health Services Charges

330. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health the measures he will take to prevent undue financial hardship on patients attending for vital medical treatment, in view of reports from the Irish Cancer Society; the assessment of ability to pay that is conducted and the waivers that apply; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57695/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): Under the provisions of the Health Act 1970, eligibility for health services in Ireland is based primarily on residency and means. There are currently two categories of eligibility for all persons ordinarily resident in Ireland i.e. full eligibility (medical card) and limited eligibility (all others).Full eligibility is determined mainly by reference to income limits, and is granted to persons who, in the opinion of the Health Service Executive, are unable to provide general practitioner, medical and surgical services to themselves and their dependents without undue hardship.There is no automatic entitlement to a medical card for persons who have cancer.

There is a provision for discretion to grant a card in cases of "undue hardship" where the income guidelines are exceeded.The HSE recently set up a clinical panel to assist in the processing of applications for discretionary medical cards where there are difficult personal circumstances. There is an emergency process for a person who is terminally ill, or in urgent need of medical attention and cannot afford to pay for it, that provides a card within 24 hours while the normal application process is completed. Details of this procedure have been made available to all GPs and Social Workers. Such applications can be initiated through the Local Health office whose manager has access to a dedicated fax and e-mail contact line to the Primary Care Reimbursement Service (PCRS). Once the medical condition is verified by a GP or a consultant, and the required personal details are provided, an emergency card is issued to that person for a six-month period.

Primary Care Services Provision

331. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health his plans for the continuation of child psychology as a critical element of primary care services; if he will provide an assurance that the model of full multi-disciplinary teams including psychology will continue to be the model employed for primary care. [57697/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): There is a commitment in the Programme for Government to introducing a better and more efficient health system, a single-tier health service that will deliver equal access to care based on need, not income. The development of primary care services must be an essential component of the health service reform process. In a developed primary care system, up to 95 per cent of people's day-to-day health and social care needs can be met in the primary care setting.

Fully developed Primary Care Teams give people direct access to integrated multi-disciplinary teams of general practitioners, nurses, physiotherapists, occupational therapists and others. There are currently 422 Primary Care Teams in place, albeit at varying stages of development. The intention is that Primary Care Teams will be supported by a wider range of professionals, including pharmacists, dieticians, psychologists and chiropodists who will form

a Health and Social Care Network. No change to this model is anticipated.

Hospital Bed Data

332. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Health the number of cystic fibrosis beds available at St. Vincent's University Hospital, Dublin; if he will provide a detailed up to date report on the new cystic fibrosis unit at Cork University Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57700/12]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): St Vincent's University Hospital (SVUH) is the designated National Adult Referral Centre for patients with Cystic Fibrosis (CF). The new Nutley Wing at the hospital, built at a cost of just under €29m and opened this summer, is designed to provide a state of the art clinical building which includes up to date isolation facilities with accommodation for people with cystic fibrosis. In the new unit 20 beds are set aside for patients with cystic fibrosis. Each bed is in a separate room with its own toilet and washing facilities. The 20 beds include 4 complete isolation rooms. The unit also provides a dedicated CF Day Unit, containing offices, treatment rooms, together with 10 single day treatment rooms, each with en-suite sanitary facilities for treating patients with cystic fibrosis.

Under a protocol for the treatment of CF patients at SVUH, signed off in July 2012 with the hospital, the HSE, Department of Health and CFA, up to 34 isolation beds will be made available in the new wing.and the 10-bed day unit will be used effectively to help ensure that patients are treated in the optimum setting. Except in certain circumstances, the additional 14 single inpatient rooms when required will be located in the Nutley Wing and these rooms will be grouped together as far as possible. 1-2 inpatient rooms in the Nutley Wing will be kept available at all times for emergency admissions. In circumstances where the emergency admission rooms have already been utilised and all the other inpatient rooms in the Nutley Wing are occupied, patients with CF will be accommodated elsewhere in clinically appropriate single rooms until such time as a room becomes available in the Nutley Wing and then the patient will be transferred there as a priority.

CUH is one of six specialist centres providing services for patients with cystic fibrosis. The adult cystic fibrosis day centre at Cork University Hospital (CUH) is an ambulatory care facility for adults with cystic fibrosis in the Munster region. I am advised that this centre caters for the majority of clinical needs of CF patients and includes 5 isolation rooms, a dedicated CF gym, a multidisciplinary team room and consultant rooms. The capital costs for this build were supported by a partnership of the HSE South and Build4Life.

With regard to in-patient services, I am advised that a location has been identified for a combined adult CF in-patient designated bed facility and respiratory unit on the CUH campus. The hospital has established a working group to progress this facility and is working in partnership with the Build4Life organisation to co-fund this development. To date Build4Life have raised over €2m to support the development of adult inpatient cystic fibrosis facilities at CUH. The HSE South and CUH management are finalising plans for the inpatient facility within the available capital resources, and within the physical space currently available on the hospital campus to facilitate the unit. A Design Team has been appointed and preliminary drawings for the unit have been prepared. The need to develop the adult in-patient facility at CUH remains a priority proposal of the Executive Management Board at CUH and the HSE South, and the HSE will continue to work with Build4Life to complete this project

Hospital Complaints Procedures

333. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghaíl** asked the Minister for Health if he will consider the issues raised in correspondence (details supplied); if he will ensure that the hospitals involved address the concerns raised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57706/12]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): There is a formal complaints policy for issues concerning hospitals under the aegis of the Health Services Executive (HSE), as Tallaght Hospital is. Details of this procedure are on the HSE website, at www.hse.ie/eng/services/ysys/Complaint. In addition, advice and instructions for making complaints about a service or an individual may be found at www.healthcomplaints.ie.

From the details forwarded to me by the Deputy, it would seem that the first stage of this process in already underway in this case.

Where an individual is not satisfied with the outcome of a complaint to a hospital and wishes to take the complaint further, they can ask for a review from the HSE's Director of Advocacy or they may go to the Office of the Ombudsman.

HSE Director of Advocacy

Oak House

Millennium Park

Naas

Co Kildare

Tel 1890 424 555

Office of the Ombudsman

18, Lower Leeson Street

Dublin 2

Tel 1890 223 030

Email: ombudsman@ombudsman.gov.ie

I have no role to play in this complaints procedure.

Issues relating to the Coroner and Coroner's Court are a matter for the Department of Justice and Equality.

I have forwarded the details of this request to the HSE which will be dealing with the matter under the appropriate procedure and will reply directly to the Deputy.

Health Services Staff Issues

334. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghaíl** asked the Minister for Health If he will direct the Health Service Executive to provide an appropriate work placement for a staff member recovering from a severe eating disorder and if he will consider the issues raised in correspondence (details supplied) [57707/12]

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

Services for People with Disabilities

335. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health the decrease in funding provided for the disability sector in 2013 compared to 2012 in both financial terms and percentage terms; if this money will be ring-fenced by his Department for disability in its allocation to the Health Service Executive for 2012; if the HSE has any discretion to change this allocation and assign it to other health priorities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57721/12]

337. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health the provision made in the estimates for 2013 for school leavers in the disability budget; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57723/12]

338. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health if the Health Service Executive will in allocating funding to the disability sector be obliged to take into account the effects of cuts to date in each organisation; the efficiency measures already put in place by them; the differing ways the staff moratorium impacted on different organisations and the impact on service users; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57729/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): I propose to take Questions Nos. 335, 337 and 338 together.

The funding situation for the disability sector in 2013 is not yet available pending the finalisation of the HSE's National Service Plan for 2013. Savings required globally from the Health Budget will have an impact on all services, including disability services, and it is expected that these will be outlined when the Minister for Health approves the National Service Plan in the near future.

In relation to the specific queries raised by the Deputy, as these are service issues they have been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Health Services Staff Issues

336. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health the projected reduction or increase in staff in the disability sector in 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57722/12]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The Government has decided that the numbers employed across the public service must be reduced to 282,500 by the end of 2014 in order to meet its fiscal and budgetary targets. The health sector must make a proportionate contribution to the achievement of this reduction.

Following the publication of the Health Estimates on 5 December, the HSE's National Service Plan is in preparation. In accordance with the Act, the HSE's service plan will set out the type and volume of health and personal social services to be provided by the Executive in 2013. The plan will also set out the net employment reduction to be achieved for 2013. It is not possible at this stage to outline the effect of the required employment reduction on any particular service area.

Questions Nos. 337 and 338 answered with Question No. 335.

Ministerial Responsibilities

339. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his key priorities for 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57535/12]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I expect to finalise priorities for 2013 over the coming days in consultation with Ministers of State Kelly and Ring. The priorities, which flow from the Programme for Government, the Department's Statement of Strategy 2011-2014 and Ministerial initiatives were considered by the Ministerial Management Board of the Department last week. As was the case for 2012, I will be publishing the new priorities on the Department's website early in the new year. I also yesterday published a report on my Departments website on the progress made on the 2012 priorities

Road Improvement Schemes

340. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regrading special improvement road grant (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57371/12]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Deputy will appreciate that 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.

Local authorities were recently invited to submit a four year Multi-Annual Restoration Programme 2013 - 2016. The initial selection and prioritisation of projects to be funded under this grant category is a matter for the Council. It is open to the Council to prioritise this project and to include it in its four year programme.

Sports Capital Programme Applications

341. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide details of all applications from County Donegal to the sports capital programme in tabular form and include the amount applied for and the reason the application was approved or rejected [57407/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Michael Ring): Information on all applications received from County Donegal under the 2012 Sports Capital Programme including the amount of funding sought is set out in the table.

The Department is writing to all unsuccessful local applicants with details of how their applications were assessed. Given the limited resources it is not possible for me to fund all valid applications. The reason(s) why applications were deemed invalid is being outlined to the relevant applicants in the Department's correspondence referred to above. There are several reasons why an application might be deemed invalid and compiling such information into tabular format for all such applications in Donegal would involve a disproportionate amount of work. Some of the reasons why applications were deemed invalid include:

- Insufficient own funding or no evidence of own funding

- Work on project already commenced

- No evidence of freehold/leasehold/letter from landlord

- No quotations/estimates submitted

- No evidence of planning permission or application for same or letter from technical supervisor stating that planning permission is not needed

Applicant Name	Sought
Aileach Football Club	€47,302
Aileach Youth & Community Centre	€10,000
Aodh Ruadh C.L.G. (Park/Development Committee)	€168,000
Ballyliffin Golf Club	€85,000
Ballyshannon Leisure Centre Management Ltd	€95,240
Buncrana Community Leisure Centre Cooperative Society Limited	€78,256
Buncrana GAA Club	€300,000
Buncrana Youth & Community Dev. Co. Ltd.	€192,000
Carndonagh Boxing Club	€220,000
Carndonagh GAA Club	€160,000
Cashel na Cor Learning Disability Association Ltd.	€656,483
CLG Ard An Ratha	€234,059
CLG Gleann Fhinne	€74,630
CLG Iorras / Urris GAA Club	€224,593
Clonleigh Social Services Ltd.	€54,165
Clonmany Shamrocks Sport & Athletics Ltd.	€56,000
Clonmany Tug of War Club	€4,376
Clonmany Youth & Community Resource Centre	€467,391
Cloughaneely GAA Club	€160,000
Cockhill Celtic Youth & Football Club	€58,898
Coiste Forbartha Dhobhair Teo	€6,055
Comharchumann Oileán Árainn Mhór Teo	€268,182
Comhlacht Forbartha an Tearmainn, trading as Craoibhín.	€13,324
Coole Cranford Community Centre Limited	€90,000
Creeslough & District Angling Association	€35,410
Creevy National School	€54,000
Curragh Athletic Football Club	€45,000
C.L. G. Dhun na nGall	€520,000
C.L.G. Na Cealla Beaga	€25,000
C.L.G. na nDúnaibh	€336,850
C.L.G. Naomh Padraig Uisce Chaoin	€119,600
Desertegney Youth Club incorporating Dunree Football Club	€25,000
Donegal Athletics Board	€20,814
Donegal Bay Rowing Club	€20,000
Donegal County Council	€569,770
Donegal League Organisation Co. Ltd	€80,000
Donegal Mountain Biking Club	€5,013

Applicant Name	Sought
Donegal Mountain Rescue Team	€25,000
Donegal Sports Partnership	€10,000
Donegal Town Rugby Football Club	€150,000
Donegal Town Soccer Club Trust Company Ltd.- (trading as Donegal Town F.C.)	€39,328
Downstands Family Resource Centre	€15,000
Drimarone Development Association	€100,000
Drumkeen United Football Club	€115,000
Drumoghill Football Club	€88,069
Dungloe G.A.A. Club/Cumann Luthchleas Gael An Clochán Liath	€150,000
Dunlewey Celtic Football Club	€25,000
Dunree Amateur Boxing Club & Community Hall	€25,000
Finn Harps Co-Operative Society Ltd.	
Finn Valley Athletic Club	€100,000
Finn Valley RFC	€12,791
Finn Valley Swimming Pool Limited	€153,335
Fit Kidz	€63,965
Four Masters G.A.A. Club	€40,000
Frosses Foróige	€3,000
Galf Chumann Ghaoth Dobhair	€64,229
Glebe Sports Holdings Ltd	€105,362
Gleneely Colts FC Sports & Leisure Club	€25,739
Glenswilly Sports Park	€187,662
Greencastle Sports and Leisure Company Limited	€7,000
Gweebarra Canoe Club	€4,000
Illies Community Association & Illies Celtic Football Club.	€150,748
Illies Golden Gloves Amateur Boxing Club (IGG, ABC)	€246,160
Illistrin Community Development Association	€34,535
Indoor Street Ltd (Plaza Project)	€84,657
Inishowen Community & Recreational Carndonagh Community School Sports Development Project Company Ltd.	€200,000
Inishowen Football League	€12,000
IRD Milford Limited	€83,262
Kilmacrennan Celtic School Boys & Girls F.C	€21,000
Letterkenny Athletics Club	€73,350
Letterkenny Community Centre	€93,295
Letterkenny Rovers Football Club	€252,596
Letterkenny Sports Complex Development Limited.	€13,550
Letterkenny Tennis Club	€156,657
Letterkenny Youth & Family Service (LYFS)	€20,436
Lifford Athletic Club Ltd/Lifford Athletic Club	€100,000
Lifford Celtic Football Club	€129,197
Malin G.A.A.	€115,500
Milford United Football Club	€74,364

Applicant Name	Sought
Moville Celtic Football Club	€20,000
Moville GAA Club - CLG Bun an Phobail	€92,924
Mulroy Hoops Basketball Club	€7,328
Na Rossa Community Club	€300,000
Naomh Colmcille GAA Club	€110,388
Naomh Mhuire GAA Club	€10,167
Naomh Micheal GAA Club	€170,121
North West Golf Club	€69,681
Pobal Eascarrach Teoranta & Donegal County Council	€300,000
Quigleys Point Swifts Football Club	€34,000
Ramelton Tennis Club	€25,000
Ray Community Group - (formally Ray Youth Athletic Club)	€35,080
Realt na Mara CLG, Bundobhráin	€13,625
Red Hughs GAA Club	€81,153
Redcastle United Football Club	€25,000
Robert Emmets GAA Club	€25,000
Royal and Prior Comprehensive School in conjunction with Raphoe Hockey Club	€129,739
Scoil an Stratha Mhoir and Glendowan Youth Club	€47,428
Springboard Family Support Project	€6,000
St John Bosco Ac Limited	€17,673
St John Bosco Club	€700,000
St. Catherine's F.C.	€17,500
St. Eunan's GAA Club	€350,000
Termon GAA (CLG An Tearmainn)	€48,784
Tír Chonaill Gap Cycling Club	€9,200
Tír Conall Rugby Club	€538,507
Trustees of Leghawney Hall Limited	€2,691
Tullyvinney Rovers F.C.	€6,978
Twin Towns Amateur Boxing Club	€12,000

Sports Capital Programme Applications

342. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason a club (details supplied) was deemed unsuitable for any funding from the sports capital programme despite the fact they fulfilled the criteria to receive funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57408/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Michael Ring): The Department is writing to all unsuccessful applicants under the 2012 Sports Capital Programme with details of the results of the assessment of their application. The reasons why applications were deemed invalid is being outlined to the relevant applicants.

The application referred to by the Deputy was deemed invalid on two grounds under the terms and conditions of the Sports Capital Programme. Firstly, the applicant had insufficient own funding to meet the minimum matching funding requirements of the Programme and secondly; the applicant did not provide evidence that they had adequate title to the property where

the proposed facility was to be developed.

Road Improvement Schemes

343. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if funding will be allocated to Monaghan County Council in 2013 to finalise the preparatory work on the N2 Clontibret to the Border road; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57411/12]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects is a matter for the National Roads Authority (NRA) under the Roads Acts 1993 to 2007 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Within its capital budget, the assessment and prioritisation of individual projects is a matter in the first instance for the NRA in accordance with Section 19 of the Roads Act.

Noting the above position, I have referred the Deputy's question to the NRA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you don't receive a reply within 10 working days.

Cycling Facilities

344. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide an update regarding his plans for developing cycle routes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57421/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Alan Kelly): The development of interurban cycle routes is being progressed through the National Cycle Network funding scheme. Just over €7 million has been allocated to fund 16 projects, each in a different Local Authority area. A wide variety of route types have been allocated funding, including canal tow path routes, routes along disused rail lines and routes which make use of bypassed national roads. Most projects are substantially progressed. Five will be completed by year end, with the remaining projects expected to be completed in 2013. It is currently planned that a further NCN funding call will be undertaken next year for the determination of projects to be funded from 2014-2016.

In terms of developing urban cycle routes, the NTA, under its Sustainable Transport Management Grants Scheme provides funding to relevant local authorities for a range of schemes to benefit cyclists including cycle paths and cycle corridors.

Providing safe cycle routes is a key factor in encouraging more people to cycle for both transport and leisure. The Government will therefore continue to provide funding either directly or through the NTA to local authorities for the development of cycle routes.

Roads Maintenance

345. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the amount spent by the National Roads Authority on the M50 for the years 2009, 2010, 2011 and to date in 2012 on grass cutting, litter picking, road markings, road maintenance and so on; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57438/12]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects is a matter for the National Roads Authority (NRA) under the Roads Acts 1993 to 2007 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Within its capital budget, the assessment and prioritisation of individual projects is a matter in the first instance for the NRA in accordance with Section 19 of the Roads Act.

Noting the above position, I have referred the Deputy's question to the NRA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you don't receive a reply within 10 working days.

State Airports

346. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the average number of passengers per week in Dublin Airport, Cork Airport, Ireland West Knock Airport and Shannon Airport for the years 2010, 2011 and to date in 2012; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57439/12]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The matter raised by the Deputy in relation to the average number of passengers at Dublin, Cork and Shannon Airports falls within the operational responsibilities of Dublin Airport Authority and I have referred the question to the company for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a reply has not been received within ten working days.

In relation to Knock Airport, which is a privately owned company, the Deputy should address any queries regarding the airport's performance to the airport management.

Air Accident Investigations

347. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the air accident investigation unit has completed its investigation into the heavy landing by the Air Corps air ambulance on 19 June 2012; the results and recommendations on foot of this investigation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57458/12]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Following the accident which occurred to an Irish Air Corps air ambulance helicopter on the 19th June 2012 near Borrisoleigh Co Tipperary, the Minister for Defence requested that an investigation would be carried out in accordance with the Regulations set out in S.I. No. 460 of 2009 and that the Air Accident Investigation Unit (AAIU) of my Department would take the lead role in the Investigation. I agreed to this request.

I am informed by the Chief Inspector of Air Accidents that the Draft Report of this accident is in the final stages of preparation and that it will be issued to the interested parties imminently. Following a period of consideration as set out in the Regulations, it is expected that the Final Report will be published on the AAIU website early in the New Year.

Tourism Promotion

348. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to

drive tourism through local authorities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57474/12]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): My Department's role in relation to tourism is primarily concerned with national policy and the State Tourism agencies, under the aegis of the Department, deal with the operation and administration of that policy, including regional tourism development.

In this respect, Fáilte Ireland works with local authorities to maximise the tourism potential of their respective regions. I have referred the Deputy's question to Fáilte Ireland for further information in this regard. Please contact my private office if a reply is not received within ten working days.

Rail Services

349. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding a train service (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57489/12]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The scheduling and timetabling of train services is an operational matter for Irish Rail in conjunction with the National Transport Authority and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the company for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Tourism Promotion

350. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will request Fáilte Ireland to support and provide funding to Puck Fair and Summerfest festivals in County Kerry, if he will ask Fáilte Ireland to take into consideration the importance of these festivals to tourism in the county and the very special effort that they are making for the Gathering in 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57496/12]

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

Tourism Promotion

351. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to introduce an Irish language-Gaelic tourism strategy for County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57502/12]

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

Road Improvement Schemes

352. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide funding in 2013 for the Kenmare relief road, County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57503/12]

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.

Earlier this year, the National Roads Authority (NRA) invited applications (on behalf of the Department) for consideration for funding under the Specific Improvement Grants Scheme in respect of regional and local roads. Kerry County Council submitted an application for €760,000 for the Kenmare Eastern Relief Road. All applications are currently being considered by the NRA and the Department having regard to the compliance with the eligibility criteria, the need to prioritise projects, competing demands from other local authorities and the funding available under this grants scheme in 2013.

I will announce the 2013 regional and local road grant allocations early in the new year.

Tourism Promotion

353. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to introduce a singular tourism strategy for County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57504/12]

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

Taxi Regulations

354. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the concerns of a number of taxi drivers (details supplied) regarding the recommendations for the taxi industry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57526/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Alan Kelly): Overall the thrust of the reforms contained in the Taxi Regulation Review Report 2011 will mean better services for consumers and improvements to the operating environment for taxi drivers generally. It is acknowledged that some of the measures proposed by the Taxi Review may lead to increased costs for individuals. However these should be offset by the benefits to the industry in terms of a better regulated and safer taxi sector.

Many of the areas of concern to the Deputy have been addressed in the provisions of the Taxi Regulation Bill 2012, which was published earlier this month. The Bill will support measures to ensure that operators and drivers can operate under a robust regulatory framework that is supported by an effective enforcement regime. The provisions of the Bill include mandatory disqualification from holding a driver licence upon convictions of specified serious offences. This measure is in addition to the existing arrangement for Garda vetting of taxi drivers. There

is also provision for the assessment of the suitability of a person to hold a licence linked to new powers for the licensing authority to revoke or suspend, or to refuse to grant a licence, as well as a demerit scheme aimed at penalising persistent breaches of the taxi regulations.

The Taxi Regulation Bill provides for the prohibition on the transfer of a vehicle licence as envisaged in the Taxi Regulation Review Report. The underlying principle for this proposal is that a licence should determine a person's suitability to carry out a function and it should have no monetary value or be traded on the open market. The prohibition on transfer will apply to company licences and a further technical amendment to the legislation will be required to fully address the issue of company licences.

Concerning vehicle standards and the age of some vehicles currently operating in the industry, the Taxi Review Group proposed to allow vehicles licensed before 2009 to continue to operate to the point where the vehicle reaches the fifteenth anniversary of its first registration subject to a twice yearly NCT test and licence renewal assessment. This will allow some time for vehicle owners and drivers to adjust to the new standards regime. The intention is that, over time, vehicles older than nine years will be removed from the taxi and hackney fleet. It is anticipated that this measure will be implemented from 31 January 2013.

There is provision made in the Taxi Regulation Bill 2012 for appeals and representations to be made with regard to SPSV licensing and the decisions of the licensing authority.

The Taxi Advisory Committee, which I appointed during this summer, includes representatives of small public service vehicle and driver interests in line with the provisions of Section 54 of the Taxi Regulation Act, 2003.

The regulation of the small public service vehicle (SPSV) industry, including entry requirements and the operation of the testing process under the SPSV skills development programme, is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) under the Taxi Regulation Act, 2003. In this regard, I have referred your question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within 10 working days.

Sports Capital Programme Applications

355. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the way the successful sports capital grant projects were selected; if he will provide the details of the procedures that were used in selecting successful projects; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57540/12]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): All applications received under the 2012 Sports Capital Programme were first checked to ensure eligibility and then eligible applications were initially assessed against the following criteria (the final 4 criteria only apply to regional and national projects):

Selection Criteria
Increase in the levels of active participation/ improved standards of sporting performance, especially among women and older citizens
Level of socioeconomic disadvantage in the area
Technical merits of the project
Financial viability of project
Level of own funding available

Selection Criteria
Extent to which applicant will be able to maintain project after completion
Current and planned levels of sport and/or recreational sport facilities in the area
Current or proposed sharing of facilities with other sporting groups or schools
Level of SCP (or other Government) funding received in the past
Strategies to be used to attract people from disadvantaged areas
Priority of proposed improvements/ facility in relation to existing facilities
Priorities as identified by the NGB (national/regional projects only)
Priority as identified by the Irish Sports Council (NGB and third level only)
Location of facility within the network of national, regional and municipal facilities (non-local projects only)
Linkages with Local Authorities Swimming Pools Programme (municipal multi-sport only)

In deciding the final allocations of funding to local projects within each county Minister Varadkar and I had regard to a number of additional factors, including: - the performance of each application during the assessment process;

- ensuring a geographic spread of projects within each county;

- ensuring an appropriate spread of projects between rural and urban areas within each county; and

- ensuring that there is a spread of projects among different sports.

Taxi Regulations

356. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when it is expected to be announced the recommendations of the Taxi Regulation Review Report that will be implemented and the level of engagement that has taken place with taxi operators; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57554/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Alan Kelly): The Taxi Regulation Review report was published by the Government in January of this year. It contains 46 actions targeting at improving the regulation and operation of the small public service vehicle industry.

Responsibility for implementation of the majority of the recommendations of that report rests with the National Transport Authority (NTA) which is the body responsible for regulating the small public service vehicle industry.

I understand from the NTA that they have implemented ten of the actions in full and that a considerable number of other actions are scheduled to come into operation in January of 2013. The NTA have informed me that new regulations have been adopted by the Board of the NTA which will introduce new measures relating to taxi door signage, vehicle age limits, rental controls and notification requirements for drivers of the vehicles that they are operating, during January 2013.

There was significant engagement with the taxi industry during the Taxi Regulation Review, including a public consultation process involving an opportunity for written submissions and

for oral presentations from key stakeholder groups. There were also four representatives from the taxi sector on the review group and the Minister met many taxi groups in advance of the review process.

Since the publication of the Taxi Regulation Review Report, I understand that the NTA has engaged extensively with the Advisory Committee on Small Public Service Vehicles (the "Advisory Committee") and the sub-group of that committee comprising of industry representative members. The NTA has informed me that the various proposals that are intended to be introduced in January 2013 were the subject of consultation with the Advisory Committee.

Emergency Vehicles

357. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if obsolete equipment including redundant emergency vehicles from Shannon Airport were made available to voluntary groups along the Shannon Estuary since July 2012; if the airport received expressions of interest for equipment from Foynes Search and Rescue; if they were successful in their request for equipment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57561/12]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The matters raised by the Deputy are ones that fall within the operational responsibilities of Shannon Airport Authority and I have referred the question to the company for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a reply has not been received within ten working days.

Local Improvements Scheme

358. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to allocate funding in 2013 to local authorities for local improvement schemes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57629/12]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Local Improvements Scheme provided funding for the maintenance and improvement of private roadways which are, in the first instance, a matter for the relevant landowners.

State grants available to supplement expenditure by local authorities on the maintenance of regional and local roads have been reduced significantly and there will be further cuts over the next few years. The scale of the cuts have necessitated that some grant programmes be curtailed or ended.

In making adjustments to the regional and local roads allocations the primary aim has been, as far as is possible, to protect previous investment in the road network and use the available funding to maintain and restore public roads, including those in rural areas. Given that priority, it was not possible this year to assist with any works on private roads.

The feasibility of providing funding to assist with maintenance of private roads will be reviewed in the context of the monies available under the 2013 grant allocations for regional and local roads. In the interim, it is open to local authorities to continue to operate the scheme or a similar scheme from their own resources.

I will announce the 2013 regional and local road grant allocations early in the new year.

Road Improvement Schemes

359. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will ensure that funding is provided to Cavan County Council for the 2013 road works scheme; if he will outline the progress of the proposed major upgrading of the East/West route from Cootehill to Dundalk [57639/12]

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.

Earlier this year the National Roads Authority (NRA) on behalf of the Department requested information from local authorities in respect of Strategic Regional and Local Road schemes. Cavan County Council submitted an application for funding towards the preliminary design stage of the Cavan to Dundalk scheme. All applications will be considered by the NRA and the Department having regard to eligibility criteria, the need to prioritise projects, competing demands from other local authorities and the funding available for this grant category in 2013.

I will announce the 2013 regional and local road grant allocations early in the new year.

Transport Costs

360. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which transport costs have been identified in the context of the implementation of national economic recovery; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57654/12]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Government's plans to address the economic difficulties facing all elements of the economy are set out in the Programme for Government and place a heavy emphasis on the delivery of effective transport services. In addition, the Government's Jobs Initiative includes a number of measures intended to stimulate tourism by increasing the competitiveness of access transport and our tourism product.

The predominant element of transport costs is fuel. My Department has no direct control over this cost but keeps under review all costs over which we do have an influence, including the cost of services provided through our agencies. In this context, my Department is engaged in an initiative to reduce, where feasible, the administrative cost to business of complying with transport legislation. In addition, the Minister for Finance announced in his Budget Statement the introduction of a rebate on diesel for hauliers with effect from 1 July 2013 in order to assist the competitiveness of this key industry.

In general, transport demand is primarily derived from the outputs of other economic sectors. One would expect increases in demand and employment within the transport sector to result from increased economic outputs generally.

Sporting Events

361. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which he expects to utilise sport as a medium to protect a positive national image at

home and overseas in 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57655/12]

364. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which he and his Department expects to be in a position to utilise high profile sporting fixtures as a means to boost economic recovery and the national image; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57658/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Michael Ring): I propose to take Questions Nos. 361 and 364 together.

Sport is one of the most widely enjoyed and valuable sectors of Ireland's society, beneficial to our economy, health and culture. The performance of Irish athletes on the world stage this year, in the London Olympic and Paralympic Games, and in sports including golf, rugby, football and boxing, not only boosts the morale of the country but it also promotes our image internationally and has the potential to generate tourism from around the world.

The allocation for the Irish Sports Council for 2013 is almost €43.2 million. This funding will allow the ISC to continue to support our elite athletes through the High Performance Programme as they compete on the world stage.

There is a financial dividend to be obtained through the success of major sporting events, particularly those with an international dimension. Through a variety of actions and investment, Ireland has developed a reputation as a destination to play and watch sports. Stadia such as the Aviva, Croke Park and Thomond Park attract international and domestic tourists in large numbers throughout the year.

The Programme for Government includes a commitment that event tourism will be prioritised in order to continue to bring major events to Ireland. As well as bringing spectators to our shores, the hosting of events such as the Ryder Cup, the Tall Ships Race, Volvo Ocean Race or the Solheim Cup can provide a great showcase for Ireland. Fáilte Ireland continues to support the holding of sports and other events that can boost tourism.

Tourism Industry Issues

362. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which the tourism sector is projected to develop and expand in 2013; the degree to which any such expansion is likely to impact on the economy as a whole; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57656/12]

370. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the total number of persons employed directly and or indirectly in the tourism sector; the potential for improvement in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57664/12]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 362 and 370 together.

The Government recognises the key role that the tourism industry will play in our economic recovery and has put in place a range of programmes and measures to support tourism, enhance competitiveness and further grow the sector next year and beyond. Key commitments in the 2011 Programme for Government were reflected in the Government's Jobs Initiative, with further actions set out in the 2012 Action Plan for Jobs. The Government has already delivered on measures such as reducing VAT to 9% on a range of tourism services and halving employers' PRSI for those on modest wages. These measures will continue in 2013.

In terms of our main tourism priority, the Gathering Ireland 2013 will be the biggest tourism led initiative ever held in Ireland. The event aims to attract an extra 325,000 overseas visitors to Ireland with associated spending of over €150 million. Significant resources are in place to ensure that 'The Gathering' will be successful in delivering these targets. A special allocation of €5 million was provided in 2012 and a further specific allocation of €7 million has been provided for 2013. The overall provision for tourism services in 2013 is approximately €140 million across a diverse range of activities.

In seeking to grow overseas visits to Ireland, our objective is ultimately to generate jobs. The Central Statistics Office (CSO) does not measure tourism employment as such, but does measure "Accommodation and Food Service" employment, a category that includes hotels, restaurants, bars and catering. According to the most recent figures from the CSO, employment in the accommodation and food sector accounted for 123,100 jobs in the third quarter of 2012.

Drawing on an alternative approach, Fáilte Ireland's estimate of all direct jobs in tourism and hospitality businesses in 2012 (full-time, part-time, seasonal/casual and not confined to "main job") indicate total employment across sectors, including tourism services and attractions as well as accommodation and food, of around 185,000.

Using The Gathering Ireland 2013 as our centrepiece for 2013 and through continued collaboration between Fáilte Ireland, Tourism Ireland and the Irish tourist industry, I am confident that we can further grow business for the tourism sector next year with consequential growth in employment.

National Transport Authority

363. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the full extent of the budget at the disposal of the National Transport Authority; the way the authority prioritises its work projects; the various agencies, statutory or otherwise the authority consults in the course of its spending on the various selected projects; the way the selection process is done; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57657/12]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. The National Transport Authority (NTA) was established on 1st December 2009 in accordance with the Dublin Transport Authority (DTA) Act 2008. In fulfilling its functions under the Act, the Authority has a broad role in relation to transport planning, provision of public passenger transport services as well as the provision of public transport infrastructure. The NTA consults with a range of stakeholders in carrying out these functions.

Given the Authority's responsibility in this regard, I have referred the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you don't receive a reply within 10 working days.

Question No. 364 answered with Question No. 361.

Hospitality Industry

365. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which he has continuous dialogue with the hotel and catering sectors with a view to identifying the issues most commonly regarded as impacting positively or negatively on the

industry at the present time; if bank lending or credit has been a feature of any such discussions; the degree to which he has had discussions with the banking sector in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57659/12]

366. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which he has investigated the effect of debt on the hotel, catering and consequently the tourism sector over the past two years; the degree to which provision has been made to address any such issues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57660/12]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 365 and 366 together.

I am in regular contact with stakeholders in the tourism industry and indeed I met, at their request, with the Irish Hotels Federation (IHF) most recently just prior to the Budget and the issues of bank lending and credit as well as the existing hotel debt burden were discussed.

The issue of credit availability is primarily a matter for the Minister for Finance. I am informed by him that the Government has imposed SME lending targets on the two domestic pillar banks and the banks meet with the Department of Finance and the Credit Review Office (CRO) on a quarterly basis to discuss progress and address any issues arising. The Government has also introduced the Microenterprise Loan Fund Act which provides for a scheme to facilitate additional lending to microenterprises over the next five years. Furthermore, the Government is in the process of facilitating up to €150 million per annum of additional credit through the Temporary Partial Credit Guarantee Scheme, designed for SMEs who, because of lack of collateral or because of the specialised sector they operate in, face difficulties in accessing bank credit.

In relation to the issue of debt burden on the sector, I have examined and discussed with the IHF their recent report on this matter, including their proposals to address the issue. The proposals all fall to be considered by the Department of Finance and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and in that regard, following on from the Budget, I have signalled my intention to have further discussions with the Minister for Finance on the possible involvement of hotels in the extended Employment and Investment Incentive Scheme (EIIS) and the Real Estate Investment Trust (REIT) initiative.

Transport Costs

367. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which he intends to highlight issues affecting transport costs here during Ireland's presidency of the EU; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57661/12]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Presidency Programme on Transport is very ambitious and will focus on delivering key legislative dossiers as we enter final 18 months of current Commission and European Parliament. There are over 20 dossiers on the table or in the pipeline, some of which will have an impact in driving transport costs down over the longer term - particularly for Ireland as an island destination on the periphery of Europe.

The key dossiers in this context are the Connecting Europe Facility and the Trans-European Transport Network Regulation - both of which are intended to address bottlenecks and missing links across the key strategic transport routes in the EU - ensuring that Europe's transport network is efficient and fit for purpose. These will feature high on my list of priorities for the Presidency.

In addition, I am very keen to see progress in implementing the Maritime Labour Convention, launching important debates on issues such as Passenger Ship Safety and taking the next step in relation to the Blue Belt initiative – which aims to reduce the administrative burdens for short sea shipping within the EU. The 4th Rail Package is another priority dossier which has the potential to drive greater competitiveness within the rail sector in the EU and encourage a modal shift with important environmental implications. The Airports Package - which I hope to secure agreement on during my term as Chair of the Transport Council - has the potential to make a real difference in addressing the cost base within the aviation sector as a whole with significant positive impacts for consumers in the longer run.

Roads Maintenance

368. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which his Department continues to identify accident black spots on local, regional or national routes; the extent to which he expects to provide funds to alleviate such problems in 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57662/12]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads is a statutory function of each road authority in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. The carrying out of works on these roads is a matter for the relevant local authority to be funded from its own resources supplemented by State road grants. Local authorities were allocated over €6million this year for works under the Low Cost Safety Improvement Scheme. In addition to this the National Roads Authority also provided over €18 million for road safety schemes on national roads.

In July, the National Roads Authority (acting on behalf of the Department) invited applications from local authorities for funding in 2013 under the Low Cost Safety Improvement Grants Scheme in respect of regional and local roads in their respective areas.

Under the Low Cost Safety Improvement Works scheme the criterion for approval and grant allocation is based on accident data, discussions between the local authority and the National Roads Authority, together with inspection of sites. Works include a variety of safety work measures including road signage, road line works, surface works including anti-skid surfaces and works to improve sight lines at junctions and other locations. However, it must be emphasised that the initial selection and prioritisation of such works is a matter for the local authority in the first instance. I will announce the 2013 regional and local road grant allocations early in the new year.

Sale of Aer Lingus

369. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which he is kept up to date on matters appertaining to the future development of Aer Lingus including possible takeover offers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57663/12]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): In relation to the future of the State's shareholding in Aer Lingus a Steering Group has been established to examine the potential options for the disposal of the shareholding and the issues that may need to be addressed in that context. The Steering Group is chaired by my Department and comprises representatives from the Department of Finance, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and NewEra.

The position in relation to the recent Ryanair offer for Aer Lingus has been considered by me and by the Government and is being kept under review. The Offer is currently the subject of a Phase II investigation by the European Commission under the EU Merger Regulation. The deadline for the Commission's decision is 27 February 2013.

At the Government meeting on Tuesday, the matter of the State's shareholding in Aer Lingus was discussed. The Government is committed to the sale of the stake in Aer Lingus at the right time under the right conditions. However, the Government is not prepared to support any offer that would significantly undermine connectivity or competitiveness for Ireland.

Question No. 370 answered with Question No. 362.

Sports Capital Programme Applications

371. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide for each county in tabular form the number of applications received under his Department's 2012 sports capital grant programme; the number that were deemed invalid and the number that were awarded a grant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57670/12]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The information sought by the Deputy is set out in the table.

County	Number of Applicants	Local Grants Awarded	Invalid
Carlow	42	13	20
Cavan	59	14	24
Clare	72	23	30
Cork	218	64	99
Donegal	108	25	48
Dublin	281	110	145
Galway	162	33	79
Kerry	95	19	48
Kildare	76	21	42
Kilkenny	48	13	23
Laois	39	18	14
Leitrim	30	8	18
Limerick	117	22	56
Longford	30	10	13
Louth	59	22	20
Mayo	113	15	60
Meath	74	25	45
Monaghan	48	15	15
Offaly	45	14	19
Roscommon	45	10	22
Sligo	48	12	22
Tipperary	95	30	43
Waterford	69	19	34
Westmeath	43	15	24
Wexford	94	19	36

County	Number of Applicants	Local Grants Awarded	Invalid
Wicklow	56	26	25

Sports Capital Programme Applications

372. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will confirm when organisations who had applied under his Department's 2012 sports capital grant programme were officially informed that their application was invalid; if he will confirm the way this information was communicated to each organisation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57671/12]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Michael Ring): My Department is writing to all unsuccessful applicants. Where applications were deemed invalid, my Department is informing the applicants of the reasons why they were deemed invalid. This information has already been conveyed to a number of such applicants who contacted the Department in advance of receiving the Department's correspondence.

Coast Guard Stations

373. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if it is intended to seek tenders for the provision of a site for a Coastguard station in the Cleggan area of County Galway; and if it is, the reason that the Coastguard do not use the site at Cluain Leacht an Abba, An Cloigeann that is already in the ownership of the State and has an airstrip and car parking built on it; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [57730/12]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Cleggan Volunteer Coast Guard Unit, which is designated as a shoreline search unit, is currently operating out of an old Coast Guard station, sometimes called the Rocket House. It is one of a number of Coast Guard Units around the coast operating from Rocket Houses that have been identified for upgrade.

Funds are not available for the Cleggan upgrade in the current capital envelope as the building projects at Killybegs, Doolin and Greystones will take priority. The current site of the Unit and the Cleggan BIM Ice Plant have been deemed unsuitable for development by the Office of Public Works (OPW). The identification of an appropriate site can be progressed when there is more certainty about when funds may become available.