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 19, inclusive, answered orally.

Questions Nos. 20 to 89, inclusive, resubmitted.

Questions Nos. 90 to 97, inclusive, answered orally.

Petroleum and Gas Exploration

98. **Deputy John Halligan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources in view of the recent oil/gas find in Ballyroe, County Kerry and the possible find off the coast of Northern Ireland and the evidence this provides that significant gas and oil deposits exist in Irish waters, if he is considering changes in the licensing and tax regime surrounding gas and oil exploration; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9989/13]

112. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources in view of the recent oil/gas find in Ballyroe, County Kerry and the possible find off the coast of Northern Ireland and the evidence this provides that significant gas and oil deposits exist in Irish waters, if he is considering changes in the licensing and tax regime surrounding gas and oil exploration; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9988/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): I propose to take Questions Nos. 98 and 112 together.

I assume the Deputies are referring to the Barryroe oil discovery off the coast of Cork and to recent media reports relating to the potential of the Rathlin Basin offshore Northern Ireland.

The results from the appraisal well drilled last year on the Barryroe discovery were encouraging and are the first significant flows of oil on test offshore Ireland in thirteen years. However, more work, including additional appraisal drilling, will be necessary to determine if the discovery, which was originally made by Esso in 1973, can be declared commercial and progress to a petroleum production project.

In relation to recent media reports on the potential of the Rathlin Basin, I understand that these reports relate to an initial resource assessment of a prospect that has yet to be drilled. As this area is outside the jurisdiction of this State I have no function in the matter.

While there has been a modest but welcome upturn in the level of interest in exploration off our coast in recent years, the reality is that the only commercial discoveries of hydrocarbons made in the Irish offshore to date are the three producing gas fields in the Kinsale area, along

with the Corrib gas field, which was discovered in 1996. There have been no commercial discoveries of oil.

Despite the low level of commercial discoveries to date, working petroleum systems are known to exist in many of Ireland's offshore basins, as demonstrated by a number of non-commercial discoveries as well as other oil and gas indicators such as hydrocarbon shows in wells. Nevertheless, the oil and gas potential of the Irish offshore is largely unproven and is likely to remain so until there is a significant and sustained increase in the number of exploration wells being drilled from the current levels of 1 to 2 wells per year.

To this end my Department encourages exploration investment through an active and targeted promotion campaign, regular licensing rounds and by supporting petroleum research projects that deepen knowledge of the petroleum potential of the Irish offshore. Maintaining an appropriate fiscal regime is also critical to attracting this much needed exploration investment to Ireland.

Ireland's tax terms for oil and gas production are deliberately aimed at attracting new investment and are set at a level comparable to countries such as France, Portugal and Spain, who, like Ireland, have limited petroleum production and with whom we compete for exploration investment.

The Deputies will be aware that I welcomed the publication by the former Joint Committee on Communications, Natural Resources and Agriculture of its report on Offshore Oil and Gas Exploration. The report will contribute to the debate on how best to maximise the benefits to Ireland from the exploration and production of our indigenous oil and gas resources. I have already had the opportunity to discuss the report in the Seanad and I look forward to discussing the report in the Dáil in the not too distant future,

Energy Prices

99. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the extent to which he and his Department directly or in conjunction with the Regulator have endeavoured to ascertain the extent to which petrol and diesel prices at filling stations accurately reflect oil prices on the world markets throughout each of the past six years to date; if he will set out the prices charged per barrel throughout the period in question; the prices charged at filling stations in the same period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9955/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): Neither I nor the Commission for Energy Regulation has a statutory function in the regulation of petrol and diesel prices.

The Irish oil industry is fully privatised, liberalised and deregulated and there is free entry to the market. There is no price control and it is Government policy to encourage price competition and consumer choice.

The upward trend in petrol and diesel prices arises primarily from increases in international commodity prices over which Ireland has no control. For example, the benchmark spot price of a barrel of Brent Crude Oil has risen from an average of US$58 in February 2007 to an average of US$117 in February 2013. This has inevitably resulted in an increase in retail petrol and diesel prices.

Previous surveys have shown that prices charged by Irish retailers for oil products relate to

the refinery price rather than to the price of crude oil. Prices at the pump reflect volatile market prices, transportation costs, trends in euro/dollar exchange rates and other operating costs, together with the impact of taxation on oil products.

The EU Market Observatory publishes an Oil Bulletin with current and historical oil product prices for all EU countries. As of February 11th 2013, the price of petrol in Ireland was marginally below the EU average; while the price of diesel was 4.8% higher than the EU average.

If duties and taxes are stripped out then the price of petrol in Ireland was 98.5% of the EU average; and the price of diesel was less than 1% higher than the EU average.

Against the background of high world oil prices my focus is on measures that will increase the penetration of renewable energy resources in the area of transport.

The Biofuel Obligation Scheme incentivises and enables the sustainable growth of an Irish biofuels market. The Scheme currently requires that the amount of biofuel brought to the market is not less than 6.38% of petroleum road transport fuels. In 2011 some 145 million litres of biofuel were brought to the Irish market.

The development of electric vehicles offers potential for Ireland to use cheaper grid sourced electricity, an increasing amount of which is sourced from renewable resources.

These opportunities will progressively reduce our dependence on imported fossil fuels for transport, while supporting energy competitiveness and security.

Television Licence Fee Collection

100. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources when he intends to replace the television licence with a broadcasting charge; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10085/13]

105. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources his plans to introduce a new charge to replace the current television licence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9973/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): I propose to take Questions Nos. 100 and 105 together.

The Programme for Government commits to examining the role and collection of the TV licence fee in light of existing and projected convergence of technologies and to transforming the TV licence into a household based Public Broadcasting Charge to be applied to all eligible households and applicable businesses, regardless of the device used to access content or services.

In line with this commitment, my Department is involved in the ongoing analysis and policy development work that is necessary in advance of the implementation of any changes that may be required.

The replacement of the existing funding system based on the collection of television licence fees with one based on the imposition of device-independent charge on eligible households and businesses is a complex process and the logistics involved require thorough attention. Issues such as identifying the most appropriate collection method, exemptions and enforcement mechanics require detailed consideration and all have a bearing on the timeframe for implementation.

As I have previously indicated to the House, my Department is currently carrying out a Value for Money Policy Review conducted by an independently chaired group on the proposed policy. I expect to receive a copy of the group's recommendations and report for my consideration by the end of March.

It should be noted that although subject to a degree of evasion, the existing TV licence fee system has provided a stable funding base for our public service broadcasters. The rationale for providing State funding for public service broadcasting is to provide an independent and reliable income flow that allows these corporations to attain their public service objects while ensuring they can maintain editorial independence. This is especially important in the context of news and current affairs.

The overall aim of Public Service Broadcasting is to provide services and content which cater for all interests in society, while ensuring that the varied elements of Irish culture and its intrinsic values are protected.

Through the statutory obligations placed on the Public Service Broadcasters and the criteria set for the funding of content through the Sound & Vision Scheme, which is funded from licence fee revenue, the production of quality indigenous programming and the production of minority interest programming is strongly promoted via the current funding regime.

Whatever the system of funding, the rationale for providing funding will continue to apply and any changes that may be implemented must continue to provide a secure funding base for public service broadcasting and content.

It is also important that any changes to the system of funding should take account of the reality of new mechanisms to access such content and services and the pervasiveness of such content in today's society.

Publicly-funded public service broadcasting and content are now available to everyone on an ever-increasing range of platforms and devices and, in fact, access is not dependent on the ownership of a device. In short, everyone benefits from the availability of these services, regardless of how content is accessed or relayed to the public, and, therefore, it is my view that the cost should be borne by society as a whole. This underlines the rationale for a household based broadcasting charge. I will advance proposals in this regard after receipt of the Value for Money Report, which I referred to earlier.

Post Office Network

101. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources his views on the need to maintain a strong rural post office network; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9986/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): As the Deputy will appreciate An Post is a Commercial State body with its own Board and Management. Therefore operational matters are a matter for the Board and management of An Post. These are areas in which I have no statutory function.

As shareholder, however, I do have a strong concern in relation to the ongoing commercial position of the Company and I regularly liaise with the Company in this regard.

It is my strong objective that An Post remains a strong and viable State company, providing high quality services on a nationwide basis through a network of economically viable post of-

fices. I know that this objective is shared on all sides of the House. I must, however, stress that the Company must be in a sustainable and viable financial position to ensure this. I would also remind Deputies that An Post is a Commercial State Company and their strategy and decision-making must be formulated in this context.

I firmly believe An Post has many strengths. It is a trusted brand and it also has the largest retail presence in the country. I have impressed on the Company the need to further exploit its unique position in this regard and have been supportive of its attempts to diversify its income streams and to win a wider range of commercial contracts offering higher margins.

I welcome the progress An Post has made towards diversification including the announcement that following the decision of AIB to close a number of branches, an extended range of AIB services is available through Post Offices in the locality of the closures. This is beneficial not only to An Post as a commercial body but also to the local communities.

I, and my Department, will maintain ongoing contact with the Board and Management of the Company to work with them on our shared objectives in light of the challenging environment which they face.

Broadband Services Speeds

102. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he has identified any legislation needed for the rollout of high speed broadband; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9972/13]

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

Specifically, it commits to:

- 70Mbps to 100Mbps available from the commercial market operators to more than half of the population by 2015,

- At least 40Mbps, and in many cases faster speeds, to at least a further 20% and potentially as much as 35% of the population, and

- A minimum of 30Mbps for every remaining home and business in the country.

During the preparation of Ireland's National Broadband Plan, the commercial market operators indicated that they expect to provide 70Mbps to 100Mbps services to 50% of the population by 2015. The commercial sector is already committed to approximately €1bn investment, which will deliver broadband speeds of 30Mbps to 150Mbps per second to homes and businesses.

For example:

- Eircom is currently investing up to €500m in a phased deployment of fibre to the cabinet infrastructure, which is planned to make high-speed broadband available to 1.2m premises. The network has already reached more than 200,000 premises and is expected to be launched in 2013.

- UPC is investing €500m in its cable and fibre network, which is delivering speeds of up to 150Mbps. UPC aims to have this service available to 700,000 homes by 2015.

- Mobile telecommunications operators will be rolling out advanced mobile broadband products in 2013, following the recent multi-band spectrum auction. Arising from the huge increase in the use of smart phones and tablet devices, advanced mobile broadband is of increasing significance. It is expected that fibre connections will be required to service many of the base stations that transmit mobile signals.

A key element of the Plan is the Government's commitment to investing in areas where high speed services are not commercially viable and will not be provided by the market.

The Plan also sets out a wide range of actions aimed at supporting and accelerating commercial sector investment in next generation broadband. It includes measures aimed at stimulating increased rates of digital adoption among citizens and businesses, the removal of barriers to make the various planning and consent approval systems more efficient and cost effective, a review of spectrum policy and legislation, as well as the potential contribution that State entities can make in infrastructure deployment.

A High Level Group has been established to oversee implementation of the Plan. Any legislative requirements that emerge as part of the implementation of the Plan, including the specific commitment to revise and update the spectrum legislation in the 1926 Wireless Telegraphy Act, will be progressed accordingly.

Earlier this month, my Department launched a tender for experts to assist in the design, planning and procurement of the State-led investment. Intensive technical, financial and legal preparations including stakeholder engagement will be ongoing throughout 2013 with a view to the launch of a procurement process in 2014.

The combination of these actions are designed to ensure the Government commitment that all parts of Ireland will have at least 30Mbps connectivity.

Question No. 103 answered with Question No. 95.

Telecommunications Services Provision

104. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the way he plans to expand Ireland's digital economy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10070/13]

106. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources his proposals to advance the digital society here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10060/13]

131. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the way that he will meet the challenge to persuade the remaining one in five households not connected to the internet to do so; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10081/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): I propose to take Questions Nos. 104, 106 and 131 together.

The Government fully accepts importance of the digital economy and to Ireland's economic development. Research by Boston Consulting Group cited in the recent UPC report on Ireland's

Digital Future, estimates it will grow from a current rate of about 3% of GDP to 6% by 2016.

Research currently underway in the context of the forthcoming National Digital Strategy will look further at this value and ways it might be enhanced. That research will be concluded shortly and I propose to publish it in parallel with the National Digital Strategy.

As Deputies are aware there is substantial employment in Ireland in the ICT and digital sectors arising from the presence of world leading companies in these areas based in Ireland. In addition, smaller indigenous companies are also making an important contribution. For example, the Digital Hub currently caters for 66 digital enterprises, which between them, employ some 800 people. More than three-quarters (78%) of these companies expanded their business operations last year, with 44% hiring additional staff.

Two-thirds are planning to expand their workforce this year. In addition the National Digital Research Centre (NDRC) has helped to create 155 full-time jobs and 66 part-time jobs by the end of 2012 as a direct result of the projects it has supported.

Following on from last year's National Broadband I will shortly publish Phase 1 of a new National Digital Strategy. This strategy will focus on how we can maximise the benefits of the digital technology that is available to us and will also target approaches to stimulating demand for broadband services and connectivity.

The Action Plan for Jobs published last week contains details of a specific initiative aimed at incentivising Irish micro-enterprises to begin trading online.

The National Digital Strategy will set out in detail the rationale and overall objectives of this important intervention, which will operate initially on a pilot basis in 2013.

According to CSO statistics, less than 1 in 4 SMEs in Ireland is trading online. It is not simply that firms should embrace digital to create new jobs; it needs to be done in order to preserve existing ones. This is what is happening on a global scale and Irish enterprise must keep pace if it is to survive.

Enhancement of digital skills in our education system and more generally is also of vital importance. In this context my Department is also working in partnership with the Department of Education and Skills to roll out high speed broadband connectivity to all second level schools. I believe that this scheme will assist in equipping schools and students with the digital skills, which are so important in a modern society and labour force.

The commercial sector also has a strong role to play in stimulating demand for Internet services.

The huge increase in the use of smart phones and tablet devices, increased availability of applications such as video-on-demand, and initiatives by Internet services providers to make technology more accessible to targeted segments of society, will continue to impact on the level of take up.

As part of the National Digital Strategy, my Department will work closely with the commercial sector to build on these initiatives, with a view to ensuring that citizens, business and communities realise more fully the potential of a digitally enabled society.

The evidence shows that digital engagement continues to grow steadily – as evidenced by Ireland's performance in the Digital Agenda for Europe Scoreboard. The most recent EU Scoreboard for Ireland published in 2012 shows 71% of the population are regular internet users – this is up considerably on the 63% score for the previous year – and above the EU average of

68%. The proportion of people who have never used the internet has also noticeably decreased to 21% (from 27% the previous year).

Deputies will be aware that Ireland has performed extremely well in terms of EU benchmarking of eGovernment services. Through the eGovernment strategy published last year my colleague the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform will be building on achievements to date to further improve citizens' and businesses' access to, and experience of eGovernment services. Attractive online services will also serve as a further driver of internet engagement.

Deputies will also be aware of my recent appointment of David Puttnam, the distinguished Film Director as Ireland's Digital Champion. He is strongly committed to the promotion of the digital society. I am confident that in this role he can contribute significantly to raising awareness levels of the many benefits of digital, particularly in the critical sphere of education and learning.

Overall the Deputies can be assured of the Government's commitment to proactive promotion of the Digital Economy. Much progress has already been made in this regard. The forthcoming publication of the National Digital Strategy will underpin the Government's commitment and signal specific areas for further development.

Question No. 105 answered with Question No. 100.

Question No. 106 answered with Question No. 104.

Alternative Energy Projects

107. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will supply an update on plans to make the Belmullet wave test site, County Mayo, operational, including possible joint ventures involving private investment; the priority that he is giving to the project as part of the development of our indigenous wave energy resource and without which we continue to fall behind other countries in research and development and associated jobs in this up and coming energy area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9953/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): Wave and tidal energy is still at the RD&D stage globally. Ireland has a rich ocean resource and has significant potential in this area. In order to take forward the ocean energy strategy, an Ocean Energy Development Unit (OEDU) was established in the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) in 2009.

The OEDU has been taking forward the development of the sector through administration of a Prototype Development Fund of grants for industry. SEAI has also been progressing the development of a full scale grid connected wave test site near Belmullet off County Mayo, which would complement existing wave testing facilities i.e. the wave tank in Cork and the quarter scale wave testing site in Galway Bay.

The cumulative amount of expenditure on Ocean Energy in the period 2009 – 2013, including the estimated 2013 allocation, is €20.659m.

Ireland also has an opportunity to become a leader in ocean energy industries and technologies. Accordingly, other supports for the sector include the development of the Beaufort Laboratory as part of the IMERC facility in Cork. This will see a re-housing of the wave tank facility and will bring together researchers in the area currently based in the Hydraulics and Maritime

Research Centre (HMRC) and the Coastal and Marine Research Centre (CMRC). The whole process is part of a broader campus approach with the Naval College, UCC and Cork Institute of Technology, aimed at maximising on marine industrial opportunities.

Research in the ocean energy area is ongoing in most universities across the country and ocean energy was recently identified as of 1 of 14 priority research areas by the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation in their Research Prioritisation Exercise.

The primary rationale for the Ocean Energy Programme, of which the Atlantic Marine Energy Test Site (AMETS) in Belmullet is but one component, is to develop and maximise the employment and wealth-generating industry activities that could potentially be associated with ocean energy as it evolves into a fully commercially viable sector. Various studies carried out to date have illustrated that there is considerable potential to create a range of long term jobs and viable indigenous industry.

Work is continuing in the development of the AMETS facilities off Belmullet and SEAI has been responsible for the co-ordination of the work programme. SEAI has applied to the Department of Environment for a foreshore lease in respect of the project and is the latter stages of the consenting process. Additionally a grid connection offer from ESB Networks has been accepted. A comprehensive data collection project to provide wave and seabed information for device developers is also underway.

The Government recognises the potential of our indigenous wave energy resource and the Research and Development and job potential in this area. In the context of overall reducing budgets, the capital allocation for the Ocean Energy Programme was increased to €5 million for 2013.

One of the priorities to be pursued is the further development of the Atlantic Marine Energy Test Site (AMETS). The potential for private sector involvement is being explored and the strategy as to how to bring this forward will be further considered.

Alternative Energy Projects

108. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources his assessment of the future for the biofuels sector here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10082/13]

111. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the extent to which he sees biofuels playing a role in renewable energy strategy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10077/13]

120. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources his plans regarding the biofuels sector here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10073/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): I propose to take Questions Nos. 108, 111 and 120 together.

The Biofuel Obligation Scheme was introduced in July 2010 as the primary means to meet the target of at least 10% renewable energy in transport by 2020, which was mandated by the 2009 Renewable Energy Directive. In preparing the National Renewable Energy Action Plan as required pursuant to the Directive, it was estimated that at least 8.4% of the energy in transport in Ireland in 2020 will come from the use of biofuels with the remainder achieved by the

increased deployment of electric vehicles. In common with other Member States the uptake of electric vehicles is likely to be lower than originally anticipated in the context of 2020 and therefore biofuels will likely be required to play a more significant role in meeting the 10% target.

The Biofuel Obligation Scheme works by obligating large road transport fuel suppliers to bring a certain amount of sustainable biofuels to the market. The scheme was introduced with an obligation on fuel suppliers to include at least 4% by volume biofuels in their overall disposal of road transport fuels. In order to maintain progress towards achieving the 2020 targets, I increased the obligation to 6% by volume with effect from 1 January 2013. It should be noted that strict sustainability criteria must be met in respect of biofuels to be counted under the scheme and towards our renewable energy targets.

Recently, the European Commission circulated a proposal to amend sections of the Renewable Energy Directive. This proposal is currently being progressed and is one of the major agenda items for the Irish presidency of the EU. One of the amendments proposed is that no more than 5% of the energy in the transport sector should come from biofuels produced from certain crops. My Department is currently examining the proposal and its implications for meeting the target of 10% renewable energy by 2020. However, there are no implications for the current obligation rate of 6% as the overall energy content delivered by the obligation will not breach the proposed 5%. The obligation rate of 6% will remain the same until the end of 2014. Decisions on further increases after 2014 will be taken after any amendments to the Renewable Energy Directive have been finalised.

The Biofuel Obligation has successfully delivered increased amounts of biofuel in Ireland resulting in 145 million litres being placed on the Irish market in 2011. Of this, approximately 18.5 million litres was produced indigenously from waste material such as used cooking oil. Though figures for 2012 are not yet available, I understand that the amount of indigenous biofuel on the market increased last year. The recent increase in the obligation rate along with future increases will see the biofuel market grow to an estimated 500 million litres by 2020. This will continue to create opportunities for indigenous industry to produce biofuels here in Ireland.

Exploration Licences Approvals

109. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the amount of money that has been received from companies holding a licensing option in the past three years; if he will provide a breakdown of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9978/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Fergus O'Dowd): The monies received from companies holding licensing options in the past 3 years in respect of application and rental fees is a follows:

2010	€56,711
2011	€253,586
2012	€453,651
2013	€104,506 (to date)

A licensing option may be granted for a period of up to three years. It is a preliminary authorisation and designed to allow companies assess the petroleum potential of an area, generally on the basis of existing data.

The holder of a licensing option has a right to apply for an exploration licence in respect of the area concerned and must do so by the end of option period, or else relinquish the acreage.

There are twenty two licensing options extant at present (nineteen in respect of the offshore and three in respect of the onshore). Thirteen of these options were granted in 2011 for a term of two years under the Atlantic Margin Licensing Round. Nineteen options in total are due to expire this year and the remaining three in 2014.

Broadband Services Provision

110. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will provide an update on the new national broadband plan; the way he intends to measure progress; the way he will facilitate members of the public with concerns and complaints about the level of internet access available in their areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9945/13]

121. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources his views on whether broadband speed targets for 2020 of the EU's digital agenda is sufficiently ambitious; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10064/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): I propose to take Questions Nos. 110 and 121 together.

The Government's National Broadband Plan aims to radically change the broadband landscape in Ireland by ensuring that high speed services of at least 30Mbps are available to all of our citizens and businesses, well in advance of the EU's target date of 2020, and that significantly higher speeds are available to as many homes and businesses as possible.

Specifically, it commits to:

- 70Mbps to 100Mbps available from the commercial market operators to more than half of the population by 2015,

- At least 40Mbps, and in many cases faster speeds, to at least a further 20% and potentially as much as 35% of the population, and

- A minimum of 30Mbps for every remaining home and business in the country.

The targets are, in general, in cases of those set by the EU Digital Agenda.

During the preparation of Ireland's National Broadband Plan, the commercial market operators indicated that they expect to provide 70Mbps to 100Mbps services to 50% of the population by 2015. The commercial sector is already committed to making investments of the order of €1bn which will deliver broadband speeds of 30Mbps to 150Mbps to homes and businesses.

For example:

- Eircom is currently investing up to €500m in a phased deployment of fibre to the cabinet infrastructure, which is planned to make high-speed broadband available to 1.2m premises. The network has already reached more than 230,000 premises and is expected to be launched in the coming months.

- UPC is investing €500m in its cable and fibre network, which is delivering speeds of up to 150Mbps. UPC aims to have this service available to 700,000 homes by 2015.

- Mobile telecommunications operators will be rolling out advanced mobile broadband products in 2013, following the recent multi-band spectrum auction. With the explosion in the use of smart phones and tablet devices, the use of advanced mobile broadband is of increasing significance and it is expected that fibre connections will be required to service many of the base stations that transmit mobile signals.

A key element of the National Broadband Plan is the Government's commitment to investing in areas where high speed services are not commercially viable and will not be provided by the market. My Department is making preparations to commence a formal national mapping exercise to inform the level of Government interaction that may be required and the areas that need to be targeted for a State-led investment. It will also form a critical input to an EU State Aid application in respect of any State-led intervention.

Earlier this month, my Department launched a tender for experts to assist in the design, planning and procurement of the State-led investment. Intensive technical, financial and legal preparations including stakeholder engagement will be on-going throughout 2013 with a view to the launch of a procurement process in 2014.

Any contract subsequently awarded to service provider(s) to implement the roll out of broadband in areas which require direct Government intervention will be monitored and measured in terms of performance and quality of service.

Through the implementation of the National Broadband Plan, we are committed to increasing the availability of next generation speeds significantly, with a view to ensuring that all citizens and business have a broadband connection which meets their needs to interact effectively with society and business.

A High Level Group chaired by my Department has been established to oversee progress on a wide range of actions outlined in the Plan aimed at supporting and accelerating investment in next generation broadband. These include measures aimed at stimulating increased rates of digital adoption among citizens and businesses, the removal of barriers to make the various planning and consent approval systems more efficient and cost effective, a review spectrum policy and legislation, as well as the potential contribution that State entities can make in infrastructure deployment.

The combination of these actions are designed to ensure that the Government commitment that all parts of Ireland, will have at least 30Mbps connectivity.

Question No. 111 answered with Question No. 108.

Question No. 112 answered with Question No. 98.

Postal Services

113. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the position regarding the application by the Thomas Davis Commemoration Society, Mallow, County Cork, to have An Post commemorate the bicentenary of the birth of Thomas Davis by issuing a commemorative stamp in 2014. [9892/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): The Special and Commemorative Stamp Programme for 2014, initially approved by Government on 18 December 2012, did not include a stamp to commemorate the bicentenary of the birth of Thomas Davis.

Nevertheless, I am pleased to advise that following reconsideration of the strong case made by the Thomas Davis Commemoration Society Mallow, An Post's Philatelic Advisory Committee has now recommended, subject to Government approval, the inclusion of a stamp to commemorate the bicentenary of the birth of Thomas Davis.

Mobile Telephony

114. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will report on the recent 4G spectrum sale which netted €855m for the Exchequer and if the process has been fully concluded; if any decision have been made for the ring-fencing of the money generated by the sale for broadband or other communications and energy projects; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9919/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): The management of the radio spectrum is a statutory function of the Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg) under the Communications Regulation Act, 2002 as amended.

ComReg recently announced the winning bidders of its Multi-band Spectrum Auction for the 800, 900 and 1800 MHz bands.

The winning bidders will pay €854.64 million for these spectrum rights, comprising firstly of Upfront Fees amounting to €481.7 million (adjusted as necessary by transitional arrangements) and secondly, Annual Spectrum Usage Fees in the amount of €372.95 million which will be adjusted for inflation and paid in instalments until July 2030. The duration of the licences is to 2030.

I can confirm that ComReg transferred the amount of €450M, which is slightly over 50% of the fees, to the Exchequer on Friday 14th December 2012. The remainder of the fees will be paid on an annual basis over the duration of the terms of the licences.

The Deputy may wish to note that fees received by ComReg for spectrum access are transferred directly to the Exchequer in accordance with provisions of Section 30 of the Communications Regulation Act 2002 as amended and do not come under the control of my Department at any time.

Responsibility for the allocation of Exchequer receipts, including the spectrum receipts, falls within the remit of my colleague the Minister for Finance and is not a matter in which I have any statutory role.

Exploration Licences Approvals

115. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if a licencing option has been granted to a company for oil off the County Kerry coast, the stage it is currently at; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9980/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Fergus O'Dowd): I wish to advise the Deputy that nine licensing options were granted to various companies over areas in the Porcupine Basin off the south west coast under the 2011 Atlantic Margin Licensing Round. Details of the authorisations granted together with a map showing the areas involved are available in the latest acreage report and concession map which is published on my Departments website and can be viewed on the following link:

http://www.dcenr.gov.ie/Natural/Petroleum+Affairs+Division/Acreage+and+Activity+Reports/

The licensing options were granted for a period of two years from 1 November 2011 subject to the carrying out of a work programme agreed with my Department. They are preliminary authorisations and are designed to allow companies assess the petroleum potential of an area, generally on the basis of existing data. Drilling is not permitted at the licensing option stage. The holders of the licensing options have a right to apply for a frontier exploration licence over the area concerned and must do so by the end of October this year, or else relinquish the acreage.

In relation to more advanced petroleum exploration off the south west coast the Deputy may wish to know that the holders of Frontier Exploration Licence 3/04, operated by Exxon Mobil Exploration and Production Ireland (Offshore) Ltd. are preparing to drill an exploration well on the Dunquin prospect in the Porcupine Basin later this year.

Social Media Regulation

116. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the action he and his Department can take to help the estimated one in four pupils here, aged nine to sixteen years, who have experienced cyberbullying; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10067/13]

135. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources his views on whether self-regulation can be adequate with regard to the internet; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10078/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): I propose to take Questions Nos. 116 and 135 together.

As the Deputies will be aware, Social Media are online platforms that allow people create, share and exchange information, and to comment amongst themselves in virtual communities and networks. To date, these media have not been subject to a formal regulatory regime akin to that used to 'regulate' traditional radio and television broadcast media, either in Ireland or in other jurisdictions. There is a range of reasons for this, not least the rapidly evolving nature of the technologies involved, the sensitivities around regulating media and the multi-jurisdictional nature of the Internet.

It is important to acknowledge the economic and social benefits that the widespread use of social media have brought to people, communities and to business. However, some of the issues that have arisen as a consequence of this bear consideration. These challenges include dealing with harassment and bullying online, as well as issues around defamation, data protection and even copyright.

There has been a very considerable amount of discussion on these matters in the recent past at EU and Council of Europe level, in which my Department has been involved. Indeed this matter is also the subject of a fundamental debate at EU and national level at present, a fact reflected by the recent decision of the Joint Oireachtas Committee to examine the issue.

As Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, I have policy responsibility for providing a supportive legislative and regulatory environment to facilitate the development of high quality communications infrastructure and services. However, I should highlight that I do not have sole responsibility for addressing as to how that infrastructure is used. Responsibility, in the context of abuse over the Internet in particular, also sits with the Minister for

Justice and Equality, and the executive agency of his Department, the Office for Internet Safety.

It is clear that there are no simple answers to the challenges posed by the development and abuse of social media, not least because of the international basis of the services and because any possible policy responses fall across a range of Government Departments. In recognition of this complexity my Department maintains open and regular contact with all Departments and State Agencies with responsibilities in this area.

My Department also monitors international developments with a view to ensuring that domestic policy within its remit reflects best practice and that the regulatory framework is amended as necessary. In that regard, I look forward to the deliberations of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Transport and Communications, and I also look forward to meeting the Committee on this subject.

Television Licence Fee Collection

117. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources when he proposes to introduce a new broadcasting charge; if the revenue from that charge will be confined to one broadcaster only; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10059/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): The Programme for Government commits to examining the role and collection of the TV licence fee in light of existing and projected convergence of technologies and to transforming the TV licence into a household based Public Broadcasting Charge to be applied to all eligible households and applicable businesses, regardless of the device used to access content or services.

In line with this commitment, my Department is involved in the ongoing analysis and policy development work that is necessary in advance of the implementation of any changes that may be required.

Although subject to a degree of evasion, the existing TV licence fee system has provided a stable funding base for our public service broadcasters. The rationale for providing State funding for public service broadcasting is to provide an independent and reliable income flow that allows these corporations to attain their public service objects while ensuring they can maintain editorial independence. This is especially important in the context of news and current affairs.

The overall aim of Public Service Broadcasting is to provide services and content which cater for all interests in society, while ensuring that the varied elements of Irish culture and its intrinsic values are protected. Through the obligations placed on the Public Service Broadcasters, which are established in legislation passed by the Oireachtas, and the criteria set for the funding of content through the Sound & Vision Scheme, the production of quality indigenous programming and the production of minority interest programming is strongly promoted.

Whatever the system of funding, the rationale for providing funding will continue to apply and any changes that may be implemented must continue to provide a secure funding base for public service broadcasting and content.

It is also important, of course, that any changes to the system of funding should take account of the reality of new mechanisms to access such content and services and the pervasiveness of such content in today's society.

Publicly-funded public service broadcasting and content are now available to everyone on an ever-increasing range of platforms and devices and, in fact, access is not dependent on the ownership of a device. In short, everyone benefits from the availability of these services, regardless of how content is accessed or relayed to the public, and, therefore, it is my view that the cost should be borne by society as a whole.

The replacement of the existing funding system based on the collection of television licence fees with one based on the imposition of device-independent charge on eligible households and businesses is a complex process and the logistics involved require thorough attention. Issues such as identifying the most appropriate collection method, exemptions and enforcement mechanics require detailed consideration and all have a bearing on the timeframe for implementation.

My Department is currently carrying out a Value for Money Policy Review conducted by an independently chaired group on the proposed policy. I expect to receive a copy of the group's recommendations and report for my consideration by the end of March.

Revenue accruing from the introduction of any such charge would serve to fund public service broadcasting in the State, funding for which is currently provided to RTÉ, TG4 and also to independent broadcasters through the Sound and Vision fund operated by the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland. As the Deputy will be aware, the Programme for Government also commits to review the funding of independent broadcasters to ensure a healthy broadcasting environment in Ireland and work is ongoing in this regard.

Television Licence Fee Collection

118. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources his plans to replace the television licence; the number of other EU Member States that impose such a charge in order to provide revenues to a commercial broadcaster; the way charges here compare in real terms with charges in other countries; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10074/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): The Programme for Government commits to examining the role and collection of the TV licence fee in light of existing and projected convergence of technologies and to transforming the TV licence into a household based Public Broadcasting Charge to be applied to all eligible households and applicable businesses, regardless of the device used to access content or services.

In line with this commitment, my Department is involved in the ongoing analysis and policy development work that is necessary in advance of the implementation of any changes that may be required.

Although subject to a degree of evasion, the existing TV licence fee system has provided a stable funding base for our public service broadcasters. The rationale for providing State funding for public service broadcasting is to provide an independent and reliable income flow that allows these corporations to attain their public service objects while ensuring they can maintain editorial independence. This is especially important in the context of news and current affairs.

The overall aim of Public Service Broadcasting is to provide services and content which cater for all interests in society, while ensuring that the varied elements of Irish culture and its intrinsic values are protected. Through the obligations placed on the Public Service Broadcasters, which are established in legislation passed by the Oireachtas, and the criteria set for the

funding of content through the Sound & Vision Scheme, the production of quality indigenous programming and the production of minority interest programming is strongly promoted.

Whatever the system of funding, the rationale for providing funding will continue to apply and any changes that may be implemented must continue to provide a secure funding base for public service broadcasting and content.

It is also important, of course, that any changes to the system of funding should take account of the reality of new mechanisms to access such content and services and the pervasiveness of such content in today's society.

Publicly-funded public service broadcasting and content are now available to everyone on an ever-increasing range of platforms and devices and, in fact, access is not dependent on the ownership of a device. In short, everyone benefits from the availability of these services, regardless of how content is accessed or relayed to the public, and, therefore, it is my view that the cost should be borne by society as a whole.

The replacement of the existing funding system based on the collection of television licence fees with one based on the imposition of device-independent charge on eligible households and businesses is a complex process and the logistics involved require thorough attention. Issues such as identifying the most appropriate collection method, exemptions and enforcement mechanics require detailed consideration and all have a bearing on the timeframe for implementation.

My Department is currently carrying out a Value for Money Policy Review conducted by an independently chaired group on the proposed policy. I expect to receive a copy of the recommendations of the Value for Money Policy Review Group by the end of March.

Research undertaken prior to the establishment of the Group indicates that charges in other jurisdictions vary, for a variety of reasons, including what the charge is levied on and the method of collection, for example. National characteristics affect the model adopted, making it impossible to compare 'like for like' in terms of fees and charges and also in terms of the conditions attaching to the distribution of funding. I will revert to the Deputy in due course in relation to his specific queries on other jurisdictions.

Prospecting Licences

119. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if companies (details supplied) hold a petroleum prospecting licence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9977/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Fergus O'Dowd): The three companies mentioned by the Deputy were awarded onshore Licensing Options in February 2011 for a period of two years from 1 March 2011 to 28 February 2013. While applications for petroleum prospecting licences were submitted by the three companies, no such authorisations were granted due to the limited nature of the work programmes to be carried out under the licensing options.

Question No. 120 answered with Question No. 108.

Question No. 121 answered with Question No. 110.

Electromagnetic Fields Studies

122. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will provide the East West Inter Connector Electomagnetic Field emission measurements under assessment by the independent expert panel and a schedule of dates when the panel's report will be published. [9984/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): The East West Interconnector is a strategically vital energy project for the island of Ireland and is financially supported under the European Energy Programme for Recovery.

The Interconnector will bring many benefits to Irish electricity consumers over the decades to come, benefits such as increased competition, secure supplies of energy and the opportunity to export indigenous renewable energy.

While responsibility for non-ionising radiation lies with the Minister for Environment, Community and Local Government, I agreed with the Minister for Health, Dr James Reilly, TD, to the appointment of an independent expert panel. That panel was mandated to consider and comment on data and report on Electro Magnetic Field (EMF) emissions in relation to the East West Interconnector (EWIC) electricity cables. The independent panel comprises three experts; an expert in epidemiology (appointed by the Minister for Health); an electrical engineering expert (appointed by me as Minster for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources); and a third member (chosen jointly by both Ministers) who is an acknowledged international expert in high-voltage electricity grid systems. I would emphasise that these are three independent highly qualified experts who will report on and publish their findings on EMF emissions in relation to the EWIC.

The independent panel met for the first time on Friday, 23 November 2012. The work programme of the panel is being progressed and further meetings are planned throughout the course of 2013. It is anticipated that once the panel has considered and commented on the first sets of data, those datasets and commentary will be made publicly available.

As the Deputy is no doubt aware, arising out of the High Court proceedings taken in respect of the EWIC, Mr Justice Peart, held in July 2012 that the Interconnector was not operating outside its planning approval and dismissed the action. The Judge stated that there was a "complete absence of any evidence of health risks associated with the Interconnector". However, my Department will continue to facilitate the work of the independent expert panel in fulfilling its mandate.

Broadcasting Legislation

123. **Deputy John Browne** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the key measures that will be contained in the forthcoming broadcasting legislation; when he expects to publish this legislation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10056/13]

137. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources his priorities for new broadcasting legislation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10083/13]

143. **Deputy Seamus Kirk** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources when he will bring forward new broadcasting legislation; and if he will make a state-

ment on the matter. [10089/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): I propose to take Questions Nos. 123, 137 and 143 together.

I have no plans currently to introduce broadcasting legislation.

There are several areas of broadcasting policy which are actively being considered by my Department, including most specifically the question of a broadcasting charge to replace the existing method of funding public service broadcasting. When due consideration has been given to these issues and decisions have been made on policy, legislative measures will follow as appropriate.

Broadband Services Provision

124. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources when he will review the spectrum policy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9971/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): As Minister with overall responsibility for spectrum policy, I am committed to ensuring that our National spectrum resource is assigned and used effectively. The day to day management of spectrum is a matter for ComReg. Spectrum is used for a variety of purposes and its value to society and the economy are demonstrated clearly in the most recent multiband spectrum auction by ComReg and in the successful Digital TV Switchover last year.

The National Broadband Plan, which was published in August 2012, outlined the Government's commitment to reviewing and updating spectrum policy on a consultative basis.

This review, which will include revising and up-dating the Wireless Telegraphy Act 1926, is scheduled to commence in the second half of 2013. I intend that this will be a comprehensive review and will include a public consultation process. I hope to be in a position to issue a policy paper, in this regard, in early 2014 with any new legislative measures being dealt with subsequently.

Broadband Services Expenditure

125. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources his views on the necessary investment required in fibre broadband here to be competitive; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10062/13]

146. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the amount of investment in fibre broadband that will be required to achieve the targets set out in the national broadband plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10086/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): I propose to take Questions Nos. 125 and 146 together.

Approximately €1bn is being invested in Ireland by existing companies in fibre infrastructure which will deliver broadband speeds of 30Mbps to 150Mbps to most homes and businesses. This investment will provide significant choice to the consumer.

While fibre to the home (FTTH) is currently not widely available to householders in Ireland, broadband networks which are serviced by fibre are increasingly providing high speed services to the home. For example:

- Eircom is currently investing up to €500m in a phased deployment of fibre to the cabinet infrastructure, which is planned to make high-speed broadband available to some 1.2m premises by December 2014. The network has already reached more than 230,000 premises and is expected to be launched over the coming months.

- UPC is investing €500m in its cable and fibre network, which is delivering speeds of up to 150Mbps to homes and multi dwelling units (MDUs). UPC aims to have this service available to 700,000 homes by 2015.

- BT is trialling Fibre to the Cabinet technologies that will deliver broadband at up to 80Mbps. BT provides this infrastructure to Vodafone and Sky.

- Mobile telecommunications operators will be rolling out advanced mobile broadband products in 2013, following the recent multi-band spectrum auction. With the explosion in the use of smart phones and tablet devices, the use of advanced mobile broadband is of increasing significance and it is expected that fibre connections will be required to service many of the base stations that transmit mobile signals.

Many of these developments were signalled in the Government's National Broadband Plan, which I published in August last. The commercial market operators indicated that they expect to provide 70Mbps to 100Mbps services to 50% of the population by 2015. The Government is also committed in the Plan to investing in areas where high speed services are not commercially viable and will not be provided by the market.

My Department is making preparations to commence a formal national mapping exercise to identify where the market is expected to succeed and fail in the delivery of high speed broadband over the coming years. This will inform the level of Government interaction that may be required and the areas that need to be targeted for a State-led investment. It will also form a critical input to an EU State Aid application in respect of any State-led intervention.

Through the implementation of the National Broadband Plan, we are committed to increasing the availability of next generation speeds significantly, with a view to ensuring that all citizens and business have a broadband connection which meets their needs to interact effectively with society and business.

In this context, the Government is committed to the delivery of the speeds referred to in the Plan, to ensure that all parts of Ireland will have at least 30Mbps connectivity.

Hydraulic Fracturing Policy

126. **Deputy Michael Colreavy** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources when he expects the Environmental Protection Agency report on hydraulic fracturing to be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9975/13]

128. **Deputy Michael Colreavy** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if any licensing options or exploratory licences will be granted for hydraulic fracturing prior to the publishing on the Environmental Protection Agency report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9976/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Fergus O'Dowd): I propose to take Questions Nos. 126 and 128 together.

I have made it clear on a number of occasions that any application for an exploration licence that proposed the use of hydraulic fracturing as part of an unconventional gas exploration programme would be subject to a full environmental impact assessment. An Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) entails consideration of the potential impacts of a project on population, fauna, flora, soil, water, air, climatic factors, material assets, including the architectural and archaeological heritage, landscape and the inter-relationship between the above factors. Under the EIA Directive, it is not possible to permit a project unless it can be determined following assessment that it would not have an unacceptable environmental or social impact.

In this context, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has commenced a process to issue a public call inviting interested parties to tender for the offer of funding from both the EPA Strive Programme and my Department to conduct detailed research on the use of Unconventional Gas Exploration and Extraction in Ireland, in particular with regard to the use of hydraulic fracturing (fracking) technology. The study follows on from the preliminary research into the environmental aspects of shale gas extraction, conducted by the University of Aberdeen, which was published by the EPA in May 2012.

The proposed terms of reference for this study have been developed and are currently the subject of a Public Consultation Process which was launched on 11 January 2013. Interested parties have been invited to submit written comments by 8 March 2013. Further details are available from the EPA website (www.epa.ie). The final results of this study are expected in early 2015.

As I have confirmed to the House on a number of previous occasions, no decision will be made on any proposal for the use of hydraulic fracturing in exploration drilling in Ireland until there has been time to consider the outcome of this further EPA research.

Environmental Schemes

127. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the way he is using Ireland's Presidency of the EU Council to advance a green tech agenda; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10088/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): There are a number of items to be progressed by the Irish Presidency in relation to the promotion of green technology.

The Council conclusions on last year's Commission renewable energy communication invited the Commission to present non-binding guidance to further improve national support schemes in order to achieve further cost reduction and market integration, as well as separate guidance on the implementation of the cooperation mechanisms provided for in the Renewable Energy Directive. The Commission is expected to publish its report in May and the Irish Presidency will facilitate discussions on it.

In May, Dublin will host the 2013 SET-Plan Conference in Dublin. The Strategic Energy Technology (SET) Plan is the EU strategy to accelerate the development and market roll-out of low carbon energy technologies. The conference will run over two days and focus on Energy, Research and Industrial policies at European and National levels.

The Energy Council in June will deliver Council conclusions on the Internal Energy Market

Communication. This communication sets out actions to drive towards the achievement of the internal market for energy. The aim of achieving this internal market is to benefit customers, promote competition, achieve sustainability of supply and to decarbonise the electricity industry through increased renewable energy penetration and the improvement of infrastructure.

The Irish Presidency is also progressing discussions on the proposal to amend the Renewable Energy Directive and the Fuel Quality Directive to take into account the indirect land use change impacts of biofuels. These proposals include measures which would incentivise the production and use of next generation biofuels. There will be orientation debates at the February Energy Council and March Environment Council and it is the Presidency's aim to produce a Progress Report for both Councils in June.

Finally, last month the Commission published a draft Directive on the Deployment of Alternative Fuels Infrastructure. The aim of this proposed directive is to reduce dependency on oil throughout the EU by ensuring that adequate infrastructure is available in Member States both for the supply of alternative fuels such as compressed natural gas, hydrogen and biofuels and for the charging of Electric Vehicles. The Commission will present on its proposal at the Transport Council on 11 March and there will be a first exchange of views by Member States.

Question No. 128 answered with Question No. 126.

Electricity Transmission Network

129. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will direct EirGrid to implement smart grid technology in County Mayo until such time as the 400kv line planned for is in place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9952/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): EirGrid's Grid25 programme is a strategy designed to develop the transmission networks in order to ensure safe, secure and affordable electricity supplies throughout Ireland supporting economic growth, renewable and sustainable energy. The Government endorses this major investment programme currently underway in the high voltage electricity transmission system. Grid25 is the most important investment in Ireland's transmission system for several generations and will position our energy system for decades to come.

The Smart Grid is a key enabler of a future low carbon electricity system that facilitates demand side efficiency, increases the share of renewable and distributed generation and enables consumer participation. EirGid's Smart Grid programme is a series of projects to upgrade the current electricity system while continuing to operate and maintain a safe, secure and reliable system. EirGrid is also involved in the Smart Grid Innovation Hub which is a collaborative initiative between the EirGrid Group and the National Digital Research Centre (NDRC) to promote the development of innovative Smart Grid solutions. EirGrid and SONI (System Operator Northern Ireland) support a number of demonstration projects in the Smart Grid sector in order to encourage the development of a Smarter Grid in Ireland and Northern Ireland.

I understand that EirGrid would be happy to offer the Deputy a briefing in relation to the overall Grid25 strategy, including the GridWest project in County Mayo. This briefing would also include information on the deployment of Smart Grid technologies that will help system operators use grid infrastructure more efficiently.

Electricity Transmission Network

130. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if significant public funds of €3 million are to be paid to a contractor who did not complete the East West Inter Connector project on time and would appear not to be contractually entitled to such payments; and if these payments are to be made, the reason for same. [9985/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): This is a day to day operational matter for EirGrid and not one in which I, as Minister, has a role or function.

Question No. 131 answered with Question No. 104.

Energy Schemes Issues

132. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the actions he is taking to help ensure that the Shannon LNG project in County Kerry will proceed; his views on the employment and economic benefits associated with this project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9944/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): I and Government colleagues have consistently been supportive of the proposal by Shannon LNG to construct a LNG terminal near Ballylongford, County Kerry. Such a facility, together with the bringing onshore of Corrib Gas would provide important security of gas supply for Ireland in future years.

The Deputy will be aware that on 29 June 2012 the Commission for Energy Regulation (CER) published its decision on the treatment of the gas interconnectors. The Deputy will also be aware of Shannon LNG's application to the Courts for Judicial Review of the CER decision of 29 June last. The case is due to commence on 28 February. In view of the legal process now in train and the fact that Ireland and the Attorney General have been named as respondents in the case I will not be making further comment in the matter.

Question No. 133 answered with Question No. 97.

Broadband Services Provision

134. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will outline the effect on his Department's budget of the cutting of the EU's broadband budget for the period 2012-2014 by nearly €7 billion; if he believes that Ireland will reach its 2020 EU broadband targets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9918/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): I refer the Deputy to my reply to Parliamentary Question No. 471 of the 19th February.

Question No. 135 answered with Question No. 116.

Exploration Licences Approvals

136. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources his views on whether the exploration licence granted to a company (details supplied) to prospect off the coast of Dublin complies with the Aarhus Convention; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9990/13]

142. **Deputy John Halligan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources his views on whether the exploration licence granted to a company (details supplied) to prospect off the coast of Dublin complies with the Aarhus Convention; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9991/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Fergus O'Dowd): I propose to take Questions Nos. 136 and 142 together.

The Aarhus Convention, which is implemented through the Public Participation Directive, obliges the State to adopt all measures necessary to ensure that, before consent is given, projects likely to have significant effects on the environment by virtue, inter alia, of their nature, size or location are made subject to an assessment with regard to their effects and that such assessment be subject to public participation in the decision-making. This has already been the practice in Ireland in the case of exploration for oil and gas.

Prior to the launch of Licensing Rounds for the award of exploration authorisations offshore Ireland, a Strategic Environmental Assessment or SEA, has been undertaken. An SEA of the Celtic and Irish Seas was also undertaken prior to the award of the exploration licence in the Kish Bank Basin. An SEA, which includes both public consultation and consultation with prescribed bodies, is the process by which environmental considerations are required to be fully integrated into the preparation of Plans and Programmes and prior to their final adoption. The objectives of the SEA process are to provide for a high level of protection of the environment and to promote sustainable development by contributing to the integration of environmental considerations into the preparation and adoption of specified Plans and Programmes.

In the event that an exploration company applies to progress a project to production, an application for approval of a Plan of Development pursuant to a Petroleum Lease would be subject to a full Environmental Impact Assessment or EIA. The EIA Directive ensures that the environmental implications of projects are taken into account in the permitting process, before the final decisions are made and it involves the public in the decision–making process making it more transparent. The specific requirements of the Directive entail consideration of the potential impacts of the project on population, fauna, flora, soil, water, air, climatic factors, material assets, including the architectural and archaeological heritage, landscape and the inter-relationship between the above factors.

Under the Directive it should be noted that it is not possible to permit a project unless it can be determined following assessment that it would not have an unacceptable environmental or social impact.

Question No. 137 answered with Question No. 123.

Online Business Voucher Scheme

138. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he has considered a charge on broadband access on households; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9974/13]

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

I have no plans to introduce a broadband charge on Irish households.

In Ireland, businesses and citizens can obtain a broadband service from a multiplicity of service providers operating in the market. The market is competitive with prices being determined by competitive dynamics between the various operators.

The State has also intervened to ensure that basic broadband services are available in those areas where commercial operators have not invested. This has generally been implemented in cooperation with private service providers on foot of a competitive process. Prices for these services would reflect market norms.

The combination of private investment and State interventions means that Ireland has met the EU Commission's Digital Agenda for Europe target of having a basic broadband service available to all areas by 2013, and the focus is now on accelerating the roll out of high speed services.

The Government's National Broadband Plan, which I published in August last, aims to radically change the broadband landscape in Ireland by ensuring that high speed services of at least 30Mbps are available to all of our citizens and businesses, well in advance of the EU's target date of 2020, and that significantly higher speeds are available to as many homes and businesses as possible. This will be achieved through a combination of private and public sector investment.

Marine Resources

139. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will list the marine energy testing facilities currently in operation in Irish waters; the extent to which each of these projects are funded by the Irish State or other states; if there are any marine energy projects currently under consideration which may require State support; if the State is in a position to provide this support; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9891/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): In terms of marine energy testing facilities in Irish waters, there is one existing wave test site in Galway Bay in operation. The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) and the Marine Institute established an Ocean Energy Test Site for quarter scale prototypes of wave energy devices in Galway Bay in 2006. The Galway Bay wave energy test site facilitates the open sea deployment of scaled prototypes of Wave Energy Converters during the early stages of the development of their concept.

Ancillary power and communications are also available on site. Wave energy devices that have been successfully deployed at the test-site since its inception include Wavebob and the Ocean Energy buoy. Also incorporated within the test site area is the SmartBay project, run by the Marine Institute. This is a national research infrastructure project for oceanographic monitoring.

The Galway Bay test site has been co-funded by the Marine Institute and Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland i.e. from state funds. Free access to the Galway site for developers is however available through Marinet. Marinet is an EC-funded network of research centres and organisations that are working together to accelerate the development of marine renewable energy - wave, tidal and offshore-wind - by offering periods of free access to their world-class testing facilities, standardising testing, coordinating research, providing focused training and industry networking. Marinet can be accessed by contacting the Hydraulics and Maritime Re-

search Centre at Beaufort, University College Cork.

The Ocean Energy Development Unit in SEAI was established to progress the ocean energy sector in Ireland. SEAI has also been taking forward the development of a full scale grid connected wave test site off Annagh Head, County Mayo. This site is not yet operational. SEAI has applied to the Department of Environment for a foreshore lease in respect of the project and is in the latter stages of the consenting process. Additionally a grid connection offer from ESB Networks has been accepted. A comprehensive data collection project to provide wave and seabed information for device developers is also underway.

The cumulative amount of expenditure on Ocean Energy by SEAI in the period 2009 – 2013, including the estimated 2013 allocation, is €20.659m. Some of this funding has also been allocated under a grant scheme for industry known as the Prototype Development Fund. SEAI has been allocated an ocean energy budget this year and has several current applications from ocean energy companies for funding under this scheme. Applications are being assessed with a view to the distribution of funds to eligible applicants within the budget available.

Other supports for the sector include the development of the Beaufort Laboratory as part of the IMERC facility in Cork, which will see a re-housing of the wave tank facility and will bring together researchers in the area currently based in the Hydraulics and Maritime Research Centre (HMRC) and the Coastal and Marine Research Centre (CMRC), as part of a broader campus approach with the Naval College, UCC and Cork Institute of Technology, aimed at maximising on marine industrial opportunities.

The Government recognises the potential of our indigenous wave energy resource and the Research and Development and job potential in this area. In the context of overall reducing budgets, the capital allocation for the Ocean Energy Programme was increased to €5 million for 2013. One of the priorities to be pursued is the further development of the Atlantic Marine Energy Test Site (AMETS) at Annagh Head. The potential for private sector involvement in this regard is being explored.

Question No. 140 answered with Question No. 97.

Television Reception

141. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if there is 100% coverage for Saorview; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9981/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): RTÉ has built, owns and controls the Saorview TV network and is responsible for the roll-out, coverage and operation of that network. This is in accordance with Part 8 of the Broadcasting Act 2009, which provides that the development of the RTÉ network is an operational matter for RTÉ.

Section 130 of the Broadcasting Act 2009 Act provides that RTÉ must roll out a national digital TV network to the same extent as its existing analogue network. In regard to SAORVIEW, as with the analogue terrestrial TV network that it replaces, the new national digital terrestrial TV service is operated by RTÉ and which provides access to the national Irish TV channels on a non-subscription basis i.e. free to air covers 98% of the population. 100% coverage is not possible on a terrestrial network.

In addition to Saorview, RTÉ has developed SAORSAT, a new free-to-air satellite service

unique to Ireland to ensure the free to air RTÉ television services are available to 100% of the population. This is the first time free to air Irish TV is available to 100% of the population. RTÉ is not obliged to provide this satellite service and is doing so on its own initiative.

Question No. 142 answered with Question No. 136.

Question No. 143 answered with Question No. 123.

Broadband Services Provision

144. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he has identified the source of funding for the rollout of broadband; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9970/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): On 30 August 2012, I published the National Broadband Plan, which contains ambitious targets for high speed broadband services across Ireland. The Plan is available on my Department's website.

The National Broadband Plan will deliver on these targets by leveraging investment from both private and public sectors. The Plan envisages that industry will be the key driver of investment with State intervention only where there is market failure.

Approximately €1bn is being invested in Ireland by existing companies in fibre infrastructure which will deliver broadband speeds of 30Mbps to 150Mbps to most homes and businesses by 2015. Mobile telecommunications operators will be rolling out advanced mobile broadband products in 2013, following the recent multi-band spectrum auction.

The Government is committed in the Plan to investing in areas where high speed services are not commercially viable and will not be provided by the market. The total funding involved for any State intervention has been indicatively estimated in the Plan at €350 million, €175 million of which will come from public funding sources with the other €175 million from the successful commercial service provider(s) emerging from a public procurement process. The actual cost to the State will be determined by the structure and outcome of the procurement process which will be designed to ensure value for money.

The precise source of funding of the necessary State investment will be decided at the appropriate time by Government. I anticipate that in advance of this decision my Department will discuss the matter with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and NewERA. In any event I wish to underline the Government's commitment to the Plan and to the securing of the necessary funding.

Electricity Generation

145. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the extent to which he has analysed the energy market requirements and targets in respect of conventional and alternative electricity-generating sources with a view to determination of the extent to which reliance on imported fossil fuels can be reduced annually over the next ten years; the extent to which he anticipates energy exports in this area to be beneficial to the national economy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9954/13]

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

Under the Renewable Energy Directive, Ireland is required to increase renewable energy from 3.1% in 2005 to 16% in 2020, with a minimum target of 10% in the transport sector. Energy is consumed across the transport, heating and electricity sectors. The intention is to reach Ireland's overall target through 40% renewable electricity, 10% renewable heating and 12% renewable transport, which together amount to 16% of all energy consumption.

This is set out in our National Renewable Energy Action Plan (NREAP) and First Progress Report on the NREAP, which are both available on my Department's website. At end 2011, 6.4% of overall energy consumption from renewable sources had been achieved, so a further increase of 9.6% across the three sectors is required in the years to 2020 if Ireland's target is to be achieved.

The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) published a report entitled "Energy in Ireland" in November 2012. That report gives an estimated figure of approximately €300 million in avoided national gas imports from the use of all renewable energies in the generation of electricity in 2011. For wind generation alone this would account for approximately an estimated €240 million of the €300 million in avoided gas imports.

The SEAI Modelling Unit estimate, subject to a variety of assumptions, that fossil fuel dependency in Ireland may be reduced by up to 14% due to the energy efficiency measures and by a further 15% by renewable energy policy in the year 2020. They have, however, also noted that a significant portion of biofuels and biomass may be imported in that period.

With regard to potential energy exports, the Memorandum of Understanding on energy cooperation that UK Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change, Edward Davey and I signed on 24 January will result in completion of consideration of how Irish renewable energy resources, onshore and offshore, might be developed to the mutual benefit of Ireland and the United Kingdom. This will determine whether it is beneficial for both countries to enter into an Inter-Governmental Agreement under the Renewable Energy Directive to provide for renewable energy trading.

If an Inter-Governmental Agreement is entered into, there are potential significant employment opportunities. As an example, employment creation arising from a 3,000MW project would be expected to be in the order of 3,000 to 6,000 job years in the construction phase, with the actual number dependent on the construction schedule to 2020. There would also be additional jobs created in the ongoing maintenance of turbines over a 20-year operating life. Further employment opportunities could arise if turbines or components were to be manufactured in Ireland. All relevant State agencies, particularly in the enterprise area, would have to coordinate their activities early in the process to ensure employment potential of export projects is maximised. This opportunity has already been identified by the Industrial Development Authority and Enterprise Ireland in their clean technology growth strategies.

Question No. 146 answered with Question No. 125.

Broadband Services Provision

147. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the number of schools that currently avail of the 100 Mbps to schools project; if he will provide a breakdown by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9969/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): All post-primary schools will have a 100Mbps broadband connection installed by the end of 2014, through a project jointly funded by my Department and the Department of Education and

Skills (DES).

In 2009, under the initial pilot phase of this project, a total of 78 post-primary schools, were provided with 100Mbps broadband connectivity.

The national rollout, which commenced in 2012, will be completed on an incremental basis. In 2012 some 202 schools were identified for connection, completing all post primary schools across 14 Counties. Those Counties included Cavan, Clare, Donegal, Galway, Laois, Leitrim, Longford, Louth, Mayo, Monaghan, Offaly, Roscommon, Sligo and Westmeath.

A further 216 schools will be connected during 2013 with a formal announcement on the locations to be made in the coming weeks. The remaining post-primary schools, approximately 250, will be provided with a 100Mbps broadband connection by end 2014.

A breakdown by County of the number of schools that currently avail of the 100Mbps to schools project is detailed in the table:

County	Number of Schools
Carlow	2
Cavan	11
Clare	19
Cork	4
Donegal	26
Dublin	20
Galway	48
Kerry	1
Kildare	3
Kilkenny	1
Laois	9
Leitrim	6
Limerick	4
Longford	9
Louth	18
Mayo	28
Meath	2
Monaghan	13
Offaly	11
Roscommom	8
Sligo	14
Tipperary	1
Waterford	3
Westmeath	16
Wexford	3
Wicklow	1
Total	280

International Summits

148. **Deputy Colm Keaveney** asked the Taoiseach if he will provide details of all bilateral

meetings held between himself and any other individual or group at the recent annual meeting of the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, including the identity of all such groups or individuals and the purpose of each meeting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9576/13]

Taoiseach (Deputy Enda Kenny): The annual meeting of the World Economic Forum (WEF) is attended by political and business leaders and heads of international organisations and provides a unique forum for debate and discussion on a wide range of topics of global economic and political interest. I attended the 2013 annual meeting in Davos from 23-25 January. Details of my programme are set out below. The primary purpose of my engagements at the WEF was to promote Ireland as a location for international business and investment.

WEF Davos, 2013 – Taoiseach's Programme

Wednesday 23 January

Working dinner for Heads of State or Government attending World Economic Forum, hosted by Professor and Mrs. Schwab.

Thursday 24 January

Meeting with **New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) Euronext**

Media event – **CNBC Europe**

Meeting with Ms. Christine Lagarde M.D. of the **IMF** to discuss progress in implementing Ireland's EU/IMF Programme

WEF interactive plenary session on "Eurozone Crises –the way forward" with;

PM Monti of Italy

PM Rutte of Netherlands and

PM Thorning-Schmidt of Denmark

WEF working lunch on "Europe Growth and Employment"

Meeting with **Diageo**

IDA event for client companies and prospects (approximately 45 attendees) also meetings with

Facebook

Cisco

Microsoft

Cantor Fitzgerald

Friday 25 January

Media event - **Reuters**

Meetings with

Bank of America

Western Union

McGraw Hill

WEF Private High-Level working lunch to discuss the prevailing global themes for 2013

Address at **Transatlantic Business Dialogue** on strengthening the EU-US trade and investment relationship.

Enterprise Statistics

149. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach the number of new enterprises created annually in each of the past four years to date; the numbers in the manufacturing and service sectors; his plans for the future in this regard. [9444/13]

Taoiseach (Deputy Enda Kenny): The information sought by the Deputy is not available for the past four years to date but is available for 2006 – 2010. The latest CSO Business Demography returns for 2010 were released on 22 June 2012 and the tables below provide data on business start ups and active enterprises for the sectors requested.

The terms used by CSO are "enterprise births" which refers to new business start ups (companies and other forms of legal ownership), and "active enterprises", which contains all enterprises which were active at some point during the reference year. Enterprises are defined as active if they pay Vat during the reference year, have employees during the reference year, file a corporation tax return for the reference year or file an income tax return for the reference year with a turnover over €50,000.

The CSO identifies enterprise births by using available economic indicators from administrative data (Revenue Commissioner Trading returns in Corporate, Income, Employment and VAT activity). Data for 2011 is not yet available as it is dependent on the receipt of administrative data which are not filed until 2012 and are not fully available to CSO until later in 2013.

The CSO Business Demography Statistics covers the whole business economy as classified by the standard European classification of economic activity i.e. NACE Rev2 B-N excluding activities of holding companies; K 64.20.

The "Manufacturing Sector" requested by the Deputy refers to Sector C of the NACE Rev 2 classifications. The "Services Sector" requested refers to multiple sectors of the NACE Rev2 classification and only refers to "non-financial market services". NACE Rev2 sectors included in the "Services Sector" include,

1) Section H: Transportation and Storage

2) Section I: Accommodation and Food Service Activities

3) Section J: Information and Communication

4) Section L: Real Estate Activities

5) Section M: Professional, Scientific and Technical Activities

6) Section N: Administrative and Support Service Activities

Table A below contains data concerning enterprise births for 2006-2010 inclusive.

Table A: Number of Enterprise Births for 2006-2010 inclusive.

Enterprise Births:	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Manufacturing	764	576	540	678	590
Services	7,174	6,275	6,194	7,256	5,944
All Enterprises	16,696	13,461	11,954	13,810	11,237

Table B below contains data concerning active enterprises for 2006 – 2010 inclusive.

Table B: Number of Active Enterprises for 2006 - 2010 inclusive.

Active Enterprises:	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Manufacturing	13,393	13,583	13,697	13,363	12,790
Services	87,697	90,574	93,436	94,379	91,403
All Enterprises	211,950	216,198	216,265	206,575	195,431

The Business Demography 2012 Press Release of 22 June 2012 is available at;

http://www.cso.ie/en/newsandevents/pressreleases/2012pressreleases/pressreleasebusinessdemography2010/

Departmental Agencies Staff Remuneration

150. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Taoiseach if he will provide details of the payment of bonuses or other performance related payments and or allowances made to the staff of agencies under the aegis of his Department with a yearly breakdown from 2008 outlining the overall amount paid in each year period and the number of staff that received such payments and or allowances. [10172/13]

151. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Taoiseach if he will provide details of payments made to the CEO or equivalent of all agencies under the aegis of his Department including details of any bonuses, pension entitlements or any other remuneration paid to him or her in 2012. [10189/13]

Taoiseach (Deputy Enda Kenny): I propose to answer Questions Nos. 150 and 151 together.

The National Economic and Social Development Office (NESDO) is the only State Agency under the auspices of my Department.

In 2012, the salary of the Chief Officer of the NESDO was €170,546. This included an allowance of €24,355, being 16.66% of salary in lieu of superannuation.

Including the Chief Officer, five staff members of the NESDO, are in receipt of an allowance of 16.66% of salary in lieu of superannuation. Table 1 (below) details the total superannuation allowances paid to the five staff members from 2008 until 2012.

No bonuses, performance related payments or other allowances were made to NESDO staff.

Table 1 - Superannuation Allowances Paid to NESDO Staff 2008 - 2012

Year	Total Superannuation Allowances Paid (€)
2008	49,713
2009	54,567
2010	56,473
2011	50,702
2012	50,702

Ministerial Travel

152. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of Ministers that will travel for St. Patrick's Day events worldwide; the country or city each Minister will be visiting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9660/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): St. Patrick's Day offers a unique opportunity to promote Ireland's economic and political interests overseas, with levels of publicity and media attention unmatched by the national day of any other country. Ministerial visits around this period are organised to ensure that we use this exposure to maximise the promotion of Ireland's trade, promotion and investment interests and to spread a positive message about Ireland's economic recovery.

The programme of ministerial travel is drawn up by the Trade and Promotion Division of my Department in consultation with the Embassy network and the state agencies. The final programme is close to being concluded and it will be announced shortly.

Undocumented Irish in the USA

153. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will raise the issue of the undocumented Irish in the US when he meets with the US President over St. Patrick's weekend; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10273/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): The welfare of the Irish abroad in general and especially the position of undocumented Irish immigrants in the United States remains an important priority for the Government. A resolution of the situation for undocumented Irish migrants will continue to be an important priority for the Government in our ongoing contacts with the US Administration and Congress. This issue will remain a central feature of the Government's engagement with the US authorities over the St. Patrick's Day period, and my programme and that of other members of the Government, while not yet finalised, will include meetings with key political figures and the Irish community groups that provide assistance to the undocumented.

The advice of Ireland's friends and contacts within the US Administration and Congress has long been that comprehensive reform of the US immigration system and procedures is likely to be the only manner by which such a resolution can be achieved. The prospects for such reform have advanced in the wake of President Obama's re-election. The emphasis he placed on immigration reform in his inauguration address as well as in subsequent speeches, including the State of the Union address, sent a very positive signal in this regard. The indications of emerging bipartisan support for reform in Congress is also encouraging. Much further debate and discussion is likely to be required within the US political system before the shape of any

legislative deal is clear. It is therefore not possible at this stage to 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.

To reinforce the Irish government's interest in the issue I am currently undertaking a round of contacts with key Senators. Most recently, I spoke with Senator John McCain to express the Government's appreciation for the efforts he and others are making in developing bi-partisan Senate proposals and to underline our ongoing interest in the issue, and with Senator Pat Leahy who is chair of the Judiciary Committee in the Senate. I look forward to continuing my contacts with other Senators in the coming weeks

Human Rights Issues

154. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will make representations to the Moroccan authorities to use civilian courts to ensure fair retrials for those Sahrawi people given long prison sentences by the military court; if he will support the call by Amnesty International and others for the Moroccan authorities to conduct an independent and impartial investigation into the human rights abuses committed in connection with the 8 November 2010 events; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9644/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I am aware of the case to which the Deputy refers and I refer the Deputy to my answer to Parliamentary Question 8843/13 on the 20th February.

On 8th November 2010, violence broke out when Moroccan security forces tried to remove people from Gdim Izik, a camp on the outskirts of Laayoune in the Moroccan-administered Western Sahara region. The camp had been set up by Sahrawi people protesting against their perceived marginalisation, and demanding jobs and adequate housing. According to reports, eleven members of the security forces and two Sahrawis were killed during the violence.

Over 200 Sahrawis were subsequently arrested by Moroccan security forces, of whom most were released but 25 were put on trial before the military court in Rabat as a result of their involvement. On Sunday 17th February, the military court handed down nine life sentences and sentenced 14 other defendants to between 20-30 years imprisonment each. Two other defendants were released. It is believed the verdicts will now be appealed to the Moroccan Court of Cassation.

The accused have already spent two years in pre-trial detention prison and there have been allegations of torture during their imprisonment. Concerns have also been expressed regarding the fact that the defendants have been tried in a military rather than a civilian court. The UN Committee against Torture and the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture has sought to investigate and report on the situation. The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has also expressed concerns over the case.

I share the Deputy's concern regarding this case and my officials will continue to closely monitor the situation and the process regarding the appeal of the sentences. The Government will continue to raise concerns about human rights abuses in Western Sahara, in particular reports of the arbitrary arrest, detention and mistreatment of human rights defenders, with Morocco in our ongoing bilateral dialogue. Ireland has consistently called for the mandate of MINURSO, the United Nations Mission in Western Sahara monitoring the ceasefire with Western Sahara, to include a human rights monitoring element. We believe this would provide invalu-

able independent and impartial information on the status of human rights in Western Sahara.

Irish Language Issues

155. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has had any recent discussions with members of the Northern Ireland Executive in relation to the Irish Language Act; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10108/13]

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 and the Gaeltacht, Mr Jimmy Deenihan T.D. and Minister of State Dinny McGinley T.D. have had ongoing discussions on the matter with their 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. Inputs from the consultation process are now being considered.

Last November I 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. Officials in my Department maintain regular and ongoing contact with the Irish language community in Northern Ireland, most recently when they attended the official opening of Gaeláras Mhic Ardghail in Newry on Monday 18 February.

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.

Passport Controls

156. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of Irish passports that have been issued to persons who have changed their legally registered names more than once. [10147/13]

157. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the

number of Irish passports that have been issued to nationals who list their place of residence as Israel. [10148/13]

158. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of Irish passports that have been issued to persons who have changed their legally registered names more than once while also living in Israel. [10149/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I propose to take Questions Nos. 156 to 158, inclusive, together.

The information requested regarding change of names and places of residence is not maintained by the Passport Service in a format which allows the production of the statistical reports sought by the Deputy.

Passport holders legally change their names for a variety of reasons the most common being marriage. Whereas the Passport Service requests "Basis for Name to be used on passport" on the passport application form, this is for entitlement checking purposes only. The name change is recorded in the passport system. However, this is not recorded in a way which would provide the statistical information sought.

As passports are issued for a ten year period it would not be unusual for people to change address a number of times over this period. Additionally, the address to which the passport is sent is requested only for the purpose of passport delivery. Accordingly, the Passport Service cannot provide the statistical information relating to multiple changes of addresses for Israeli residents sought by the Deputy.

Passport Controls

159. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the controls in place to monitor the abuse of legally issued Irish passports by foreign intelligence services. [10150/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I can confirm that the Passport Service maintains close and regular contact with An Garda Síochána and, by extension, Interpol. I also advise the Deputy that the Passport Service encourages Irish citizens to recognise that a passport is a valuable document and recommends that any passport lost should be reported at the earliest opportunity.

Departmental Agencies Staff Remuneration

160. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will provide details of the payment of bonuses or other performance related payments and or allowances made to the staff of agencies under the aegis of his Department with a yearly breakdown from 2008 outlining the overall amount paid in each year period and the number of staff that received such payments and or allowances. [10166/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): There are no State agencies under the aegis of my Department.

Departmental Agencies Staff Remuneration

161. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will provide details of payments made to the CEO or equivalent of all agencies under the aegis of his Department including details of any bonuses, pension entitlements or any other remuneration paid to him or her in 2012. [10183/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): There are no agencies operating under the aegis of my Department.

Foreign Conflicts

162. **Deputy Charles Flanagan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will support a proposal to have the EU designate the Lebanon based militant group Hezbollah as a terrorist organisation in view of its objects and activities in particular the bombing last year of a tourist bus in Bulgaria resulting in the deaths of six people; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10300/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): The Deputy is referring to the terrorist attack carried out by a suicide bomber on a passenger bus transporting Israeli tourists at Burgas Airport in Burgas, Bulgaria on 18 July 2012. The explosion killed five Israelis and the Bulgarian bus driver and injured thirty-two Israelis, resulting in international condemnation of the bombing. At the time, as Chairman in Office of the OSCE, I expressed revulsion at the attack, saying

"I wholeheartedly condemn this act of terrorism targeting innocent civilians. I offer my deepest condolences to the families of those killed, and to the people and Governments of Bulgaria and Israel. Such an attack makes it more clear than ever how important a united front and co-operation are to combat the scourge of terrorism, which knows no borders."

I again express my wholehearted condemnation of this outrage.

On 5 February 2013, the Bulgarian interior minister announced that their preliminary investigation into the bombing had indicated that two of the suspects had links to the military wing of Hezbollah.

This matter has been discussed in a number of EU fora, most recently at the recent Foreign Affairs Council in Brussels on Monday 18th February 2013, when the Bulgarian Foreign Minister gave an initial briefing to EU Foreign Ministers on the findings of the investigation.

However, the EU has not yet decided that any particular action is to be taken in response to these developments.

Any designation by the EU of a group as a terrorist organisation is done on the basis of Council Common Position 2001/931(CFSP) on *the application of specific measures to combat terrorism* , adopted on 27 December 2001. This stipulates that such a designation shall be done on the basis of precise information and following a decision by a competent authority. Decisions on designation are taken by unanimity, following careful consideration of the information provided.

Human Rights Issues

163. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the action he is taking to address political and religious repression in Tibet at EU level and to

curb the practice of self-immolation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10324/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): The Government follows ongoing issues in Tibet with concern and I am saddened and concerned by the increasing number of Tibetans, many of them young people, who have committed self-immolation.

On behalf of the EU, the High Representative Catherine Ashton issued a declaration on 14 December 2012 on Tibetan self-immolations. This declaration was issued with the support of Member States, including Ireland. The declaration conveyed our concern at the restrictions on expressions of Tibetan identity, which appear to be giving rise to a surge of discontent in the region. While respecting China's territorial integrity, the EU called upon the Chinese authorities to address the deep-rooted causes of the frustration of the Tibetan people to ensure that their civil, political, economic and social and cultural rights are respected, including their right to enjoy their own culture, to practise their own religion and to use their own language.

This declaration also called on Tibetan community and religious leaders to use their influence to help stop this tragic loss of life.

Ireland together with our EU partners believes that constructive dialogue between the Chinese Government and the representatives of the Dalai Lama is the best way to address differences and tensions in Tibet and to reach a solution that respects Tibetan culture, language, religion and identity. It is important for the long-term peace and stability of the region that the two sides come to an agreement on the future of Tibet. To this end, we continue to encourage a resumption of meaningful dialogue.

The promotion of human rights is an important dimension of European foreign policy, as enshrined in the Treaty of the European Union. Constructive dialogue remains the EU's preferred channel for working to improve the human rights situation in China. Human rights are discussed as part of regular political dialogue as well as during specific human rights dialogues with China which have taken place since 1995.

Bilaterally, Ireland continues to convey its concerns about the situation in Tibet directly to the Chinese authorities through regular contacts in both Dublin and Beijing.

Northern Ireland Issues

164. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the recent discussions he has had with the British Government in relation to the De Silva report and the need to have a full public enquiry into the murder of Pat Finucane; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10343/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): As the Taoiseach made clear in the Dáil on 12 February, the twenty fourth anniversary of Pat Finucane's murder, the Government's position remains in favour of an independent public inquiry into the murder of Pat Finucane, in line with the all-party view in this House. Agreement by the British government to hold such an inquiry would fulfil its commitment in the Weston Park Agreement; on the basis of the findings of Judge Cory on the likelihood of state collusion. The work undertaken by Desmond De Silva QC can facilitate this, in my opinion, by helping ensure that an independent public inquiry need not be lengthy, open-ended and inordinately expensive. As I said at the time, we must build on the progress made thus far. In my contacts with Secretary of State Villiers following the publication, I made clear that the Irish Government will continue to seek an independent public inquiry. The Taoiseach also conveyed this directly

to Prime Minister Cameron. I will continue to make it clear to the Secretary of State that full implementation of the Weston Park Agreement remains a priority moral and political imperative for the Government.

Property Taxation Exemptions

165. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Finance if there will be a reduced property tax for persons living on off-shore islands in view of the higher cost of living on the Islands; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9707/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Finance (Local Property Tax) Act 2012 sets out in detail how the tax is to be administered and provides how a residential property is to be valued for Local Property Tax (LPT) purposes. While there is no provision for reducing the LPT charge in the circumstances outlined by the Deputy, I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that LPT is a self-assessment tax so in the first instance it is a matter for the property owner to calculate the tax due based on his or her assessment of the market value of the property. The Revenue Commissioners are preparing valuation guidance which, together with a liable person's own knowledge of their property, will assist them in choosing the correct value band for their property. When using Revenue's valuation guidelines, the property owner should consider the specifics of his or her own property and whether location would have a material impact on its value.

Dormant Accounts Fund Management

166. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Finance the total contingent liability attached to the dormant accounts fund and if it is intended to take any steps to reduce this liability; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9709/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As at 31 December 2012 the value of funds paid into the Dormant Accounts Fund, and not reclaimed, since its establishment in April 2003 was €386 million. This represents the amount which could be reclaimed from the Dormant Accounts Fund by account holders should they come forward. Up to 31 December 2012, the Dormant Accounts Fund had made total disbursements of €251 million leaving a balance, when realised income is included, of €160m remaining in the Fund. When this balance is deducted from the funds potential liability to account holders of €386 million the exchequer had a contingent liability of €226 million as at 31 December 2012. Section 17 of the Dormant Accounts Act 2001 sets out the mechanism for dealing with the contingency that funds may be reclaimed by their owners. The Dormant Accounts Fund consists of a ''reserve account'', moneys in which are applied to meet repayments to claimants, as well as to fees, costs and expenses of the National Treasury Management Agency which is responsible for the management of the Fund, and an ''investment and disbursements account''. It also provides that should the reserve account be depleted at any time, moneys will be paid into that account from the investment and disbursements account. If the investment account is also depleted, so that it cannot be used to service the reserve, advances will be made from the Central Fund, to the reserve account, such advances being repayable once there are surplus moneys in the Fund again.

Under Section 17(4) of the Dormant Accounts Act, 2001, the NTMA has determined, with the approval of the Minister for Environment, Community and Local Government, given with the consent of the Minister for Finance, that 15% of the total moneys received by the Fund and not yet reclaimed should be paid into the Reserve Account. The value of the Reserve Account

at end 2012 was €58 million.

The level of the Reserve Account is reviewed annually as part of the investment plan for the Dormant Accounts Fund to ensure that it is sufficient to meet any anticipated claims by dormant account holders to re-activate their dormant accounts.

Disabled Drivers Grant Eligibility

167. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the position regarding a primary medical certificate in respect of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 17. [9814/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The initial application for a Primary Medical Certificate under the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers (Tax Concessions) Regulations 1994, is made to the Senior Medical Officer of the relevant local Health Service Executive administrative area. If the Primary Medical Certificate is refused, the person may appeal the refusal to the Disabled Drivers Medical Board of Appeal, National Rehabilitation Hospital, Rochestown Avenue, Dun Laoghaire, Co. Dublin.

I understand the named person has appealed the decision of the Senior Medical Officer not to grant a Primary Medical Certificate and a date has been set for this appeal hearing.

I would point out that the Medical Board of Appeal is independent in the exercise of its functions.

Property Taxation Application

168. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Finance if a house that has been repaired of pyrite will be liable for the property tax; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10135/13]

170. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Finance if building work is completed on a property, for example an extension or conservatory, will it increase the amount of property tax owed on the property; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10291/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 168 and 170 together.

The Finance (Local Property Tax) Act 2012 sets out how the tax is to be administered, how a residential property is to be valued for Local Property Tax (LPT) purposes and provides for a number of specific exemptions from the charge. The recently published Finance (Local Property Tax) (Amendment) Bill 2013 provides for additional exemptions, including an exemption for residential properties that have been certified as having significant pyritic damage. However, this exemption does not apply if the pyritic damage has already been repaired.

I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that Local Property Tax (LPT) is a self-assessed tax so in the first instance it is a matter for the property owner to calculate the tax due based on his or her assessment of the market value of the property. The Revenue Commissioners are preparing valuation guidance which, taken together with the owner's own knowledge of the property, will assist him or her in assessing its value. The guidance will include an on-line guide that will provide indicative property valuation bands depending on the property type, age and location and it will be available on the Revenue website prior to the issue of Returns to property owners. The guidance will also draw property owners' attention to the publicly

available property price register produced by the Property Services Regulatory Authority which provides an actual sales price for all properties sold since January 2010.

When using Revenue's valuation guidelines, the property owner should consider the specifics of his or her own property, for example, if the property has certain features such as a conservatory or is larger than the average property in the area, and these factors should be taken into account in the owner's assessment of the valuation of the property. As I have previously advised the House, where the Revenue guidance is used in an honest manner, the property valuation made by a property owner will not be challenged by Revenue in accordance with its normal Customer Service Charter.

I am further advised by the Commissioners that the initial valuation of a property on 1 May 2013 will be valid up to and including 2016 and will not be affected by any improvements made to the property during this period. From the information provided by the Deputy it is unclear whether the building work will be completed prior to 1 May 2013. Where this is the case, the property owner should take this into account in assessing the value of the property. Any improvements or enhancements made to the property after the 1 May 2013 will only affect the valuation of the property on the next valuation date, which will be 1 November 2016.

Illicit Trade in Tobacco

169. **Deputy Robert Dowds** asked the Minister for Finance if records are kept of which brands of tobacco are included in smuggled or illegally sold tobacco which are intercepted by law enforcement; if so, if he will provide data on which brands have been found in illegal shipments or sales in the past year for which date is available; and the percentage of confiscated tobacco that is accounted for by each brand. [10204/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that action against the illegal trade in tobacco products resulted in the seizure of 95.6 million cigarettes in 2012, and that some 473 brands were found in the seized product. While not all seizures are tested, I am further advised that it is very frequently the case, particularly in relation to well known cigarette brands, that seized cigarettes are counterfeit. Of the total 473 brands seized, 15 of these brands each represented 1 per cent or more of the total seizures. Details of those brands and of the percentages of total seizures that they accounted for are set out in the following table.

Brands accounting for 1 per cent or more of total cigarette seizures, 2012

Brand	Percentage of Total
Golden Seagiies	39.77
Raquel	8.76
Master	5.86
Jim	5.26
821 Red	4.02
L&M Red	3.66
Capital	3.51
Bon	2.8
Marlboro Gold	2.5
Pride	2.05
Brendal	1.76

Brand	Percentage of Total
Marlboro	1.71
L&M Blue	1.68
CK	1.07
Septwolves	1.06

Question No. 170 answered with Question No. 168.

EU-IMF Programme of Support Issues

171. **Deputy Colm Keaveney** asked the Minister for Finance under the agreement with the Troika EU Commission, ECB, IMF is it his understanding that any savings realised from measures such as the recent promissory note deal must be used to pay down debt or reduce borrowings, or can such savings be used to ameliorate the extent of the budgetary adjustments currently planned in 2014 and 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9539/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): First of all it is important to note that some aspects of the promissory note deal are yet to be finalised. For example, the liquidator is in the process of overseeing a valuation and sales process for the assets of IBRC, while the final payments made under the ELG Scheme have not yet been determined. Nevertheless, as referred to by the Deputy, simulation based assessment by my Department estimate that the General Government deficit will improve by approximately €1 billion per annum over the coming years, which will bring us €1bn closer to attaining our 3% deficit target by 2015. This means that the expenditure reductions and tax increases will be of the order of €1 billion less to meet the 3% deficit (there will be negligible impact in 2013 as a result of the payout under ELG). However, this has to be seen in the light of the most recently published General Government projected deficits of €8.9bn and €5.3bn for 2014 and 2015, respectively.

While this agreement is a significant step forward in restoring sustainability to our public finances, the Government is well aware that there remains a considerable gap between what we get in revenue and what we spend. This situation is not sustainable over the longer term. In addition to the requirement under the Excessive Deficit Procedure (EDP) to bring our deficit to under 3% of GDP by 2015, it makes sense that we bring balance back to the public finances and stabilise and reduce our debt burden.

As we are less than two months into the year, I will not be drawn into speculation on the composition of the next Budget and the impact that this deal will have on it. There are a lot of other moving parts to be considered such as economic growth, tax take and expenditure performance. All of the above, including the impact of the promissory note deal, will form the basis of Government decisions regarding the Budget.

Bonds Redemption

172. **Deputy Dominic Hannigan** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of Irish Government bonds held by the ECB that will be maturing in the next 12 months; his efforts to get agreement from the ECB to return any profit from the purchase of these bonds to the Irish Government, as was the case when the ECB bought Greek Government bonds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9541/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The European Central Bank (ECB) published information on its holdings of Irish Government bonds under its Securities Market Programme (SMP) on Thursday, 21st February 2013. This showed that the ECB held €14.2 billion nominal value of Irish bonds at 31st December 2012 with an average remaining maturity of 4.6 years. The Annual Accounts of the ECB, which were also published on 21st February, show that the ECB received net interest income of €1.1 billion in 2012 from Greek, Portuguese, Italian, Spanish and Irish securities purchased under the Securities Market Programme, with €555 million of that arising from the SMP holdings of Greek government bonds. The precise information you seek in relation to the ECB holdings of Irish Government bonds maturing within the next twelve months is not available.

The package of measures for Greece agreed on November 26th 2012 by euro zone finance ministers is designed to help put the Greek economy on a path to sustainable growth and its domestic finances on a sound footing. This package was agreed in the context of the statement by Euro Area Heads of State or Government that the scale of the Greek problem is so large that it requires special attention.

One of the measures agreed in November, the Securities Market Programme (SMP) measure, will see Member States pass on, to Greece's segregated account, an amount equivalent to the income on the SMP portfolio accruing to their national central bank as from budget year 2013. Member States under a full financial assistance programme, such as Ireland, are not required to participate in this scheme for the period in which they receive financial assistance.

It is important to note that the concessions that have been agreed are specific to Greece and are accompanied by significant additional conditionality.

Ireland's needs, as a country exiting a programme, are very different to those of Greece. We are, however, examining the Greek package to see if aspects of it offer any possible benefit to Ireland, particularly in the context of our programme exit.

Proposed Legislation

173. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the reason he is proposing in the Finance (Local Property Tax) (Amendment) Bill 2013 that persons who own more than one residential property must pay and file the tax online; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9549/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The requirement for owners of multiple properties to file and pay their Local Property Tax (LPT) electronically is contained in section 44 of the Finance (Local Property Tax) Act 2012. I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that a significant number of multiple property owners are already obliged, by virtue of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997, to pay and file their tax returns electronically, and section 44 is in keeping with Revenue's strategic objective to encourage the use of electronic channels. Revenue has developed a secure on-line system for filing LPT Returns that is user friendly and easily accessible on the Revenue website. From the taxpayer's perspective, using the on-line system is the quickest and most straightforward way to complete and submit their LPT Returns, particularly so where there are multiple properties involved, as the system automatically calculates the LPT due for the individual properties, makes it easy to select a payment method from the wide range of options available, and provides immediate access to Revenue's on-line valuation guide. In addition, property owners who file their LPT Returns on-line will also benefit from a three-week extended filing deadline to 28 May 2013.

I am further advised that, from the results of the 2011 Census, produced by the CSO, internet penetration levels in households in the State are at 75%, and for those property owners who do not have internet access, they can use the internet facilities available in Revenue offices or in their local library.

Furthermore, section 36 of the Act allows a Return to be made by any person authorised to do so by a liable person. For example, a property owner may authorise a relative such as their son or daughter to complete and submit their Returns on-line and confirm the method of payment. I am informed that from their discussions with the Local Government Management Agency in connection with customer preferences regarding the Household Charge, the Revenue Commissioners understand that this latter approach was favoured in a significant number of cases.

Finally, the decision not to have to issue multiple LPT Returns to these owners will help achieve certain efficiencies and cost savings.

General Government Debt

174. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Finance the effect the recent arrangement regarding the re-structuring of the Irish Bank Resolution Corporation debt and its conversion into long term debt will have on the need to reduce the general Government balance from 2018 in line with the Fiscal Compact Treaty; the extra amount, if any, this arrangement will require to be paid off the general Government debt each year up to 2053; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9552/13]

175. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Finance the general Government balance and Exchequer deficit or surplus that will be allowed in each year from 2018 to 2025 based on current general Government debt and Exchequer debt projections, including the recent arrangement in relation to the Irish Bank Resolution Corporation and forecasts for growth, in order to comply with the terms of the Fiscal Compact Treaty; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9553/13]

176. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of the current general Government debt as computed for the purposes of compliance with the Fiscal Compact Treaty; the projected debt on the same basis for the end of each year from 2013 to 2025, taking into account our obligations under the Fiscal Compact Treaty and the recent announcement in relation to the Irish Bank Resolution Corporation; the projected GDP and GNP at the end of the same years as well as the current GDP and GNP; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9554/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 174 to 176, inclusive, together.

First and foremost, I would point out that three years is the standard forecast horizon used throughout the EU in budgetary publications and covers the medium term budgetary framework. Accordingly, when the Department publishes the *Stability Programme Update* in April it will contain official fiscal and macroeconomic forecasts until 2016.

Looking at the fiscal impact of the promissory note deal, there are some aspects of the deal which are yet to be finalised. For example, the liquidator is in the process of overseeing a valuation and sales process for the assets of IBRC, while the final payments made under the ELG Scheme have not yet been determined.

Nevertheless, simulations ran by my Department estimate that the General Government deficit will improve by approximately €1 billion per annum over the medium term and this should be instructive to the Deputy.

The Government's focus is on stabilising the General Government debt to GDP ratio and beginning the process of reducing it to a lower, safer level over time. The latest official forecast of General Government Debt was contained in Budget 2013, which projected General Government Debt peaking in 2013 before falling gradually though the forecast horizon. The debt rule in the Fiscal Compact, which implements the Stability & Growth Pact provisions, requires us to reduce that part of the debt ratio which is above the threshold rate of 60 per cent annually by at least one-twentieth of the difference between the actual rate and the threshold rate.

A transition period will apply for all countries, including Ireland, that are currently subject to the excessive deficit procedure. During this transition period, which would last for three years following the correction of the excessive deficit, the requirement under the debt correction rule is deemed to be fulfilled if we are making "sufficient progress" towards compliance.

In terms of the fiscal implications of this debt correction rule, it is important to remember that it is the debt to GDP debt ratio that is important, not the overall nominal level of General Government debt. In other words, on the basis of reasonable assumptions over the medium-term, we can expect economic growth to do much of the work in this regard.

Obviously, the reduced borrowing requirement over the medium term arising from the promissory note deal will help us to achieve our debt targets more quickly.

Additionally, the terms of the Fiscal Compact Treaty require us to converge towards our Medium Term Budgetary Objective once we are out of the EU/IMF Programme. It should be noted that the MTO is a structural balance target, net of one-offs and cyclical factors. For Ireland, the conversion of our structural budget position into nominal figures is a complex process. It is too early to try and do this in respect of the period 2018-2025 sought by the Deputy.

I would emphasise the point that while the agreement on the promissory note is a significant step forward in restoring sustainability to our public finances, this Government is well aware that there remains a considerable gap between what we get in revenue and what we spend. This situation is not sustainable over the longer term. In addition to the requirements to bring our deficit to under 3% of GDP by 2015 as per the EDP, it makes sense that we bring balance back to the public finances and stabilise and reduce our debt burden.

Banks Recapitalisation

177. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Finance the details of all investments made by the State directly or through the National Pensions Reserve Fund in the pillar banks and in Irish Life and Permanent; the current market value of these investments; the estimated value these investments will have in 2018 based on the projected performance of the banks and presuming no sale of these investments in the meantime; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9555/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The bank recapitalisation commitments made by the State to date are set out in the following table:

Government preference Shares (2009) - NPRF	3.5	3.5*	-	-	7.0
Capital contributions (with Promissory Notes as consideration) / Special Investment Shares (2010) – Exchequer **	0.9	-	-	30.7	31.6
Ordinary Share Capital (2009) – Exchequer	-	-	-	4.0	4.0
Ordinary Share Capital (2010) - NPRF	3.7	-	-	-	3.7
Total pre-PCAR 2011 (A)	8.1	3.5	0	34.7	46.3
Capital from Exchequer***	3.9	-	4.0	-	7.8
NPRF Capital	8.8	1.2	-	-	10.0
Total PCAR (B)	12.7	1.2	4.0	-	17.8
Total Cost of Recap for State (A) + (B)	20.7	4.7	4.0	34.7	64.1

* €1.7bn of BoI's government preference shares were converted to equity in May/ June 2010 (€1.8bn still left in existence). The government also received €0.5bn from the warrants relating to BoI's preference shares (excluded from table above). In addition the State received €1.1bn stock coupons from BoI and AIB relating to the Government Preference shares.					

** The IBRC amount is made up of a total capital contribution for Anglo / INBS of €30.6bn and a special investment share of €0.1bn (INBS). The Anglo / INBS capital contribution impacted in full on the GGB in 2010. The consideration for the Anglo / INBS capital contribution was €30.6bn of promissory notes. These Promissory Notes are an amount due from the State to IBRC. Each year, on 31 March, €3.06bn is paid by the Exchequer to Anglo / INBS as part of the scheduled repayments of the promissory notes. The first such repayment was made on 31 March 2010.					
*** The Exchequer cost of the 2011 BoI recap is shown net of share sale to private investors (Completed in October, 2011)					

As the Deputy will be aware, the State successfully disposed of the €1.0 billion Contingent

Capital instruments in BoI recently and last week announced the sale of Irish Life and Permanent to Great West Life Company for €1.3bn.

Unfortunately it is not possible for me to say at this time what value the remaining banking assets would be worth in 2018. This will depend on many factors over the coming years, including macro-economic variables and the performance of the domestic economy.

However, on the 19th July 2012 the NPRF published their annual report. This contained a valuation of the NPRF's ordinary and preference shareholdings in Bank of Ireland and Allied Irish Bank at 31st December 2011. As at the 31st December the NPRF valuation of its investments in Irish banks stood at €8 billion. Its investments in AIB at this date were valued at €6.1bn comprising preference shares of €2.2bn and ordinary shares of €3.9bn. Its investments in Bank of Ireland were valued at €1.9bn consisting of preference shares of €1.5bn and ordinary shares valued at €0.4bn.

In addition, the State holds direct equity investments in ptsb (now separated from Irish Life). The State also has €2bn in contingent capital instruments remaining in AIB and ptsb which are scheduled to be repaid to the State in 2016.

NAMA Accounts

178. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Finance the profit or loss made to date by the National Assets Management Agency; the book value of all property and financial assets respectively held at present and the projected profit that will be made by NAMA by the end of 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9556/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): NAMA has advised me that it reported in its annual financial statements a loss of €1,180m in 2010 and a subsequent profit of €242m for 2011. For 2012, NAMA has reported a profit of €363m for the nine months to 30 September 2012 in the recently published S.55 financial statements of National Asset Management Limited, the principle operating entity through which NAMA conducts its business. These financial statements also disclose assets totaling €29,040m including loans and receivables of €24,010m and property assets of €7.2 million. NAMA reports its financial results quarterly and annually in accordance with the requirements of the National Asset Management Agency, Act 2009 and the rules of International Financial Reporting Standards and does not publish projections of future profits.

I would like to take this opportunity to remind the Deputy that NAMAs Financial Statements and Section 55 Financial Statements as well as the relevant reports are available on the NAMA website www.nama.ie.

Property Taxation Exemptions

179. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the reason he is proposing in the Finance (Local Property Tax) (Amendment) Bill 2013 that the exemption for certain incapacitated persons would be framed so narrowly and would exclude, for example, persons who are disabled for other reasons, for example, congenital defects, many of whom need similar adaptations to their homes to accommodate wheelchairs, showering and other necessary equipment in order to live with any reasonable degree of independence. [9557/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Under the proposed new amendment

in the Finance (Local Property Tax) (Amendment) Bill 2013, a residential property that is purchased or adapted for use as a sole or main residence by an incapacitated individual where an award has been made by the Personal Injuries Assessment Board or a court or where a trust has been established specifically for the benefit of permanently and totally incapacitated individuals may be exempt from Local Property Tax. To be exempt from payment of Local Property Tax, a residential property must be acquired or adapted to make it suitable for occupation by an incapacitated individual. In the case of adaptations to a property, the exemption will not apply unless the cost of the adaptations exceeds 25% of the market value of the property before completion of the adaptations. The exemption ends if the property is sold and the incapacitated individual no longer occupies it as his or her sole or main residence. The new Bill also includes provision for relief by way of a reduction in the chargeable value of a relevant residential property that has been adapted for occupation by a disabled person where the adaptation has been grant-aided by a local authority. The reduction is limited to the lesser of the chargeable value attributable to the adaptation work carried out on the property and the maximum grant payable under the relevant local authority scheme. The relief ends on the sale or transfer of a property that has been adapted, unless the person with the disability continues to reside in the property.

Therefore, in cases where an exemption does not apply, relief may be available by way of reduction of the chargeable value of the residential property.

Tax Credits

180. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Finance if he will outline the treatment of tax credits following the bereavement of a separated spouse; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9579/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I understand that the Deputy's query concerns the tax situation that arises when two individuals who have been married or in a civil partnership, separate but do not get divorced, and one of them dies. In these circumstances the survivor is treated as a widowed individual for tax purposes. As a consequence, the surviving individual would have the following entitlements under the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 that are specific to a widowed or bereaved person:

- basic personal tax credit of €3,300 under section 461 – available only in the year of bereavement;

- widowed persons tax credit of €540 under section 461A – available in addition to the basic personal tax credit of €1,650 from the year following the year of bereavement and where the individual has not remarried;

- one-parent family tax credit of €1,650 under section 462 - available where a qualifying child resides with the claimant and he or she has not remarried or entered a cohabiting relationship;

- widowed parent tax credit reducing from €3,600 to €1,800 over the five years following the year of bereavement under section 463 – available where a qualifying child resides with the claimant and he or she has not remarried or entered a cohabiting relationship.

In relation to persons who were married and that marriage was annulled or dissolved, or if the parties were formally divorced, then each has reverted to single status without any link to the status of the other party to the former marriage. In such circumstances the death of either party to the former marriage will have no tax consequences for the surviving individual. (Note that a Church annulment does not invalidate a marriage in civil law.)

The Revenue Commissioners have published leaflets on their website on related topics:

- Leaflet IT3 – What to do about tax on the breakdown of a marriage, civil partnership or cohabiting relationship http://www.revenue.ie/en/tax/it/leaflets/it3.html ;

- Leaflet IT40 – Tax treatment of widowed persons http://www.revenue.ie/en/tax/it/leaflets/it40.html .

Financial Services Regulation

181. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he will set out in tabular form the balance held at year end for each year from 2007 to 2012 in the deposit protection account at the Central Bank of Ireland which will be used to fund any deposit guarantee scheme pay-out; the number of occasions on which payments have been made from this account since its inception to compensate savers; the amount involved; his plans to review the operation of the account following the liquidation of Irish Bank Resolution Corporation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9589/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Table

DPA Balances			
Year End	Banks	Credit Union	Total
2012	379,390,200.00	23,633,580.57	403,023,780.57
2011	434,740,900.00	0	434,740,900.00
2010	537,900,500.00	0	537,900,500.00
2009	608,262,200.00	0	608,262,200.00
2008	669,408,300.00	0	669,408,300.00
2007	526,093,100.00	0	526,093,100.00

The operation of the Deposit Protection Account is governed under European Communities (Deposit Guarantee Scheme) Regulations 1995 (SI No. 168 of 1995).

The table above shows the balance held at year-end in the Deposit Protection Account (DPA) at the Central Bank of Ireland. Each deposit-holding institution is required to maintain a balance on their DPA account of 0.2% of their total deposits (with a minimum amount of €50,000 in the case of all institutions except credit unions). This percentage is calculated annually in December. Interest is paid by the Central Bank on the DPA balances **(1)**. The decline in the DPA balance reflects the drop in deposits in Irish credit institutions.

The IBRC liquidation event is the first occasion on which payment will be made from this account.

IBRC held a balance of €1.3 million in their DPA account at the date of liquidation. This amount will be used in the first instance to fund the DGS pay-out, before the DPA accounts of other institutions are required to provide funds for this event. The cost of the DGS pay-out will be charged against the deposit of each credit institution in proportion to their share of the total balance on the DPA.

The final cost of pay-out will not be known until the Special Liquidators have completed their investigations in the next few weeks.

After the pay-out in respect of the IBRC liquidation event, the Central Bank of Ireland will become an unsecured creditor of IBRC (in liquidation) in respect of the amount paid out under

the scheme. If the Central Bank does not secure payment from IBRC (in liquidation) in respect of this unsecured debt, all other contributing institutions will be required to replenish their deposits in the DPA by end 2013, to meet their obligation to hold a DPA balance of 0.2% of total deposits.

1. Section 4 of the Financial Services (Deposit Guarantee Scheme) Act 2009 for credit unions provides that from 30 November 2012, each credit union will be required to maintain in the Deposit Protection Account at the Central Bank of Ireland, an amount equal to 0.2% of the deposits and shares held on behalf of members.

Government Bonds

182. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance his views of what constitutes conditions of financial stability in respect of the timetable for the sale by the Central Bank of Ireland of Irish Government bonds it has acquired as a result of the revised promissory note; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9590/13]

194. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question 56 of 13 February 2013, if he will confirm what he means by conditions of financial stability; if such conditions exist today and if not, by reference to what metric will he judge when such conditions have been met, and specifically if there is an interest rate metric by reference to which these bonds will not be diosposed of on the sovereign bond market. [9752/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 182 and 194 together.

The Government bonds are now held by the Central Bank of Ireland following the liquidation of IBRC.

Eight new Floating Rate Treasury Bonds have been issued to discharge the Promissory Notes liability consisting of:

- a 25 year bond of €2bn maturing in 2038 with an interest rate of 6-month Euribor plus a margin of 2.50%;

- a 28 year bond of €2bn maturing in 2041 with an interest rate of 6-month Euribor plus a margin of 2.53%;

- a 30 year bond of €2bn maturing in 2043 with an interest rate of 6-month Euribor plus a margin of 2.57%;

- a 32 year bond of €3bn maturing in 2045 with an interest rate of 6-month Euribor plus a margin of 2.60%;

- a 34 year bond of €3bn maturing in 2047 with an interest rate of 6-month Euribor plus a margin of 2.62%;

- a 36 year bond of €3bn maturing in 2049 with an interest rate of 6-month Euribor plus a margin of 2.65%;

- a 38 year bond of €5bn maturing in 2051 with an interest rate of 6-month Euribor plus a margin of 2.67%; and

- a 40 year bond of €5bn maturing in 2053 with an interest rate of 6-month Euribor plus a

margin of 2.68%.

The bonds will pay interest every six months (June and December).

The Central Bank of Ireland will sell the bonds but only where such a sale is not disruptive to financial stability. The Central Bank have undertaken that a minimum of bonds will be sold in accordance with the following schedule: €0.5bn by the end of 2014, €0.5bn per annum from 2015 to 2018, €1bn per annum from 2019 to 2023 and €2bn per annum from 2024 onwards.

The Central Bank of Ireland is responsible for financial stability considerations. I would expect the Central Bank to take full account of the health of the domestic and international banking system, the global economic situation and developments in markets when considering financial stability considerations in relation to the disposal of these Irish government bonds.

Promissory Note Negotiations

183. **Deputy Colm Keaveney** asked the Minister for Finance if he agrees with the estimate of the value of the savings achieved by the deal announced on 8 February 2013 with the liquidation of the Irish Bank Resolution Corporation and the conversion of promissory notes to longer-term sovereign bonds as being €7.9 billion, as estimated by an economist (details supplied); if not, if he will provide his own estimate, taking into account the total interest payable and the net present value of both the original promissory notes and the now sovereign bonds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9616/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As the Deputy will know, the Promissory Notes were replaced with a portfolio of long term non-amortising Irish Government bonds as a result of undertaking the transaction earlier this month. With regard to the net present value gain in this arrangement, as the Deputy is aware, the calculation of a net present value is based on a number of mathematical assumptions, including what discount rate to apply and assumptions around future refinancing rates, all of which will depend upon the outcome of future events. These assumptions can have a material impact on the ultimate valuation and it is subject to a wide range of possible outcomes. For that reason, the Department did not produce a net present value figure for publication and I am not in a position to give one now. I can assure the Deputy that a key determinant of the value of the new arrangement was debt sustainability.

International Summits

184. **Deputy Colm Keaveney** asked the Minister for Finance the details of all bilateral meetings held between himself and any other individual or group at the recent annual meeting of the World Economic Forum, Davos, Switzerland, including the identity of all such groups or individuals; the purpose of each meeting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9622/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I travelled to Davos, Switzerland, to attend the annual meeting of the World Economic Forum, from 23 to 25 January. The World Economic Forum annual meeting is attended by political and business leaders and heads of international organisations. The theme of this year's meeting was 'Resilient Dynamism'.

While in Davos I held bilaterals with a number of my counterparts and with leaders of several major multinational firms. I used this opportunity to set out Ireland's EU Presidency priorities and to promote Ireland as a location for international business and investment.

Government Bonds

185. **Deputy Colm Keaveney** asked the Minister for Finance if it is possible for the European Central Bank, acting unilaterally, to direct the Central Bank of Ireland to dispose of the long term Irish bonds created to replace the promissory notes following the dissolution of the Irish Bank Resolution Corporation onto the private market; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9627/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Government bonds now held by the Central Bank following the liquidation of IBRC will be placed in the trading portfolio of the Central Bank, and these bonds will be sold as soon as possible, provided conditions of financial stability permit. The Central Bank of Ireland is responsible for financial stability considerations. I would expect the Central Bank to take full account of the health of the domestic and international banking system, the global economic situation and developments in markets when considering financial stability considerations in relation to the disposal of these Irish government bonds. The Central Bank has undertaken that a minimum of bonds will be sold in accordance with the following schedule: €0.5bn by the end of 2014, €0.5bn per annum from 2015 to 2018, €1bn per annum from 2019 to 2023 and €2bn per annum from 2024 onwards.

Tax Reliefs Application

186. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide an update on the operation of the SARP tax relief passed in Budget 2012, including the number of persons who have availed of this tax relief; the total amount of relief awarded and the number of jobs that have been directly created as a result of this relief. [9744/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Section 14 of Finance Act 2012 introduced the Special Assignee Relief Programme which is designed to reduce the cost to employers of assigning key individuals in their companies from abroad to take up positions in the Irish based operations of their employer. Paragraph 10 of Section 14 provides that relevant employers must submit an annual return to the Revenue Commissioners detailing, inter alia, the number of employees and the amounts of exempt income claimed under the programme. This return was not sought until after the end of the tax year 2012 in order to ensure that an accurate picture of take up levels over a full tax year could be provided. Therefore, given that 2012 is the first year of the programme, reliable statistics on its uptake will not be available until later this year.

IBRC Liquidation

187. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance in relation to Irish Bank Resolution Corporation, the par value, impairment provision and book value of loans at 31 December 2012, 31 January 2013 and 6 February, 2013. [9745/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised that the information requested is commercially sensitive and it would not be appropriate for the special liquidator to release information outside of that already published in IBRC's Accounts. Detailed information in relation to the Bank's financial performance, including information on provisioning, is published in the Bank's interim report and annual report and accounts. The most recent information can be found in the Bank's Interim Report 2012, page 72. It is Bank policy not to publish any additional confidential commercially sensitive financial information which could

potentially have a detrimental impact on asset recovery in the impending sale process.

IBRC Liquidation

188. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 60 of 13 February 2013, the reason only €123m of €323m of deposits in Irish Bank Resolution Corporation on 31 January 2013 are at risk of loss. [9746/13]

189. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question 60 of 13 February 2013, if he will outline the types of deposit that comprise the €123m of deposits that are at risk of loss, and if any Irish credit unions are amongst the depositors whose deposits are at risk. [9747/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 188 and 189 together.

I have been advised that the previous PQ No. 60 of 13 February 2013 does not refer to only €123m of €323m of deposits being at risk of loss. It refers to €123m as being the estimated level of deposits eligible under Deposit Guarantee Scheme (DGS). The remaining deposits are considered as ineligible under DGS; a portion of these deposits will be covered by the Eligible Liabilities Guarantee (ELG) Scheme. As payments under the ELG Scheme are on the basis of claims submitted to the NTMA as operators of the Scheme it is too early for me to confirm how much will eventually be paid out under the Scheme as a result of the liquidation.

In relation to Irish Credit Unions, I am advised by the Central Bank of Ireland that certain tracker bonds sold to Credit Unions which were liabilities of IBRC at the time of the liquidation have a structured deposit element which is covered by the Deposit Guarantee Scheme but fall outside the eligibility criteria for the ELG Scheme due to the nature of the investment product concerned. Unfortunately, if a deposit is not eligible under the ELG scheme the depositor will rank as an unsecured creditor in the liquidation. I am advised that this may impact a small number of Credit Unions.

The individual Credit Unions affected and the Irish League of Credit Unions have been in contact with the Special Liquidator in relation to this matter. It should be noted that the Government has already provided €500 million of taxpayers' money to support the stability of credit unions through resolution and restructuring. In addition, the Credit Union movement has its own stabilisation fund.

Financial Services Regulation

190. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the total held in deposits by Anglo Irish Bank and Irish Nationwide Building Society on 1 October 2010; the total held in deposits in Anglo Irish Bank and Irish Nationwide Building Society on 1 October 2010 not covered by the eligible liabilities guarantee; the charge to the Deposit Guarantee Scheme if Anglo Irish Bank and Irish Nationwide Building Society were liquidated on 1 October 2010. [9748/13]

191. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the total of unguaranteed unsecured senior bonds in Anglo Irish Bank and Irish Nationwide Building Society on 1 October 2010. [9749/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 190

and 191 together.

Unfortunately my Department has been unable to obtain the information requested by the Deputy in the time available. I will write to the Deputy directly with the information as soon as it becomes available.

IBRC Liquidation

192. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance in relation to Irish Bank Resolution Corporation, the way the special liquidator will obtain independent valuations of IBRC's loans; when such valuations will be undertaken and completed; the identity of the party or parties undertaking the valuation; the methodology to be used and the cost of the independent valuations. [9750/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by IBRC that request for proposals ("RFPs") have now been sent out to potential advisors in respect of the first tranche of assets for valuation. Successful applicants will be appointed to provide independent valuations for each loan or connection in the portfolios. This loan valuation process is expected to commence in early March and be completed by late June. As advisors are yet to be identified/engaged for all portfolios the special liquidators are not in a position to comment on the methodology to be used by the advisors and the cost of the independent valuations.

IBRC Liquidation

193. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance in relation to Irish Bank Resolution Corporation, the way the special liquidator will ensure all loan sales are conducted in an open and transparent fashion so that potential buyers will be able to obtain adequate information and have sufficient time to assemble financing and in general, the way the special liquidator will ensure that the sales price obtained represents the optimum value for the taxpayer. [9751/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): There is an obligation on the Special Liquidators to ensure that the assets of IBRC are sold at a price which maximises the overall return for all its creditors including the State. I am advised that the special liquidators are still in the process of devising and implementing a sales process in respect of IBRC's assets and are therefore not in a position to comment in detail at this time. However, it should be noted that there is an obligation on the special liquidators to ensure that assets of IBRC are sold at a price that is equal to or in excess of the independent valuations that are to be obtained and that this will be done in an open and transparent manner.

Question No. 194 answered with Question No. 182.

IBRC Liquidation

195. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if he will outline any restrictions on activities of the former chief executive officer of Irish Bank Resolution Corporation during the period of the IBRC liquidation. [9753/13]

196. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if the former chief executive officer of Irish Bank Resolution Corporation is precluded from advising potential buyers of IBRC assets during the period of the IBRC liquidation. [9754/13]

197. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the confidentiality restraints that apply to the former chief executive officer of Irish Bank Resolution Corporation. [9755/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 195 to 197, inclusive, together.

The special liquidators have confirmed that there are restrictive covenants and confidentiality provisions included in the employment contract of the former CEO of IBRC. The special liquidators have confirmed that the former CEO owes a common law duty of confidentiality that continues following the termination of his employment with IBRC, such that he is restricted from using confidential information obtained during the course of his employment to the detriment of IBRC.

In addition Ethic in Public Office Acts applies to former executives and other office holders in the IBRC including the former CEO. This Act requires that former office holders should act in a way which ensures an unfair advantage would not be conferred in a new appointment, by virtue of for example, access to official information the office holder previously enjoyed.

Small and Medium Enterprises Supports

198. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance further to the announcement on 8 January 2013 by the National Treasury Management Agency, if he will confirm the volume and value of applications received by a company (details supplied) in respect of the €300-350m equity fund; the volume and value of applications approved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9756/13]

199. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance further to the announcement on 8 January, 2013 by the National Treasury Management Agency, if he will confirm the volume and value of applications received by a company (details supplied) in respect of the €100m equity fund; the volume and value of applications approved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9757/13]

200. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance further to the announcement on 8 January, 2013 by the National Treasury Management Agency, if he will confirm the volume and value of applications received by a company (details supplied) in respect of the €100m equity fund; the volume and value of applications approved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9758/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 198 to 200, inclusive, together.

I am informed by the National Treasury Management Agency, as Manager of the National Pensions Reserve Fund (NPRF), that the announcement in January 2013 of the three new SME funds to provide equity, credit and restructuring/recovery investment has been received well in the market place. The NPRF has completed commitments of €125 million to the SME Equity Fund managed by Carlyle Cardinal Ireland and €50 million to the SME Turnaround Fund managed by Better Capital Fund and the managers of these funds have recently commenced actively seeking appropriate investments. The SME and Mid-Corporate Credit Fund to be managed by BlueBay is currently being prepared for its launch, which is expected in the second quarter of 2013.

The details of individual investments made by the Funds in question are commercially sensitive and, as a commercial investor, the NPRF is subject to confidentiality provisions in the

various fund formation agreements. The NPRF intends to publish a report regarding the investments made under the Strategic Investment Fund programme, including information along the lines requested, on an aggregate basis in July and January each year, commencing in July 2013. Announcements in respect of specific developments in relation to each of these Funds will be made available on the NPRF website as they arise.

Banks Recapitalisation

201. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance further to the announcement on 25 July 2011, of the sale of a 35% stake in Bank of Ireland to a group of North American investors for a price of up to €1.123bn, if he will confirm the sums received to date; the date received, and a schedule of any further payments due. [9765/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): On 25 July 2011, the Minister for Finance announced that a group of investors had committed to buy up to €1.1bn of the NPRF's shares in Bank of Ireland. This commitment reduced, from €1.9bn to €0.8bn (58% reduction), the potential maximum cost for the State to meet the bank's PCAR equity capital requirement. As a result of investment from other non-Government sources, the total cost to the State (through the NPRF) from underwriting the bank's equity capital raise reduced from €0.8bn to €0.2bn (including net underwriting fees received by the NPRF of €0.05bn). The actual amount sold by the NPRF to the investors was 10.5bn Bank of Ireland shares at a price of 10c per share. The disposal of these shares took place in two tranches. The first disposal for €0.24bn settled on 2 August 2011 with the second, and final, tranche for €0.81bn settling on 17 October 2011.

The net proceeds from the disposals were transferred, on foot of a Ministerial Direction, from the NPRF to the Exchequer within 5 days of receipt from the investors.

There are no further payments due.

Credit Unions Issues

202. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if credit unions are part of the eligible depositors who will be burnt as a result of the Irish Bank Resolution Corporation Act; the steps he is taking to assist credit unions in this eventuality. [9823/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by the Central Bank of Ireland that certain tracker bonds sold to credit unions which were liabilities of IBRC at the time of the liquidation have a structured deposit element which is covered by the Deposit Guarantee Scheme for that element of the product. As a result the first €100,000 of any claim from these depositors is covered under the DGS Scheme. The bond itself is not covered by the ELG scheme as it predates that scheme. Credit unions affected have been advised to deal with the Special Liquidator in relation to this matter.

IBRC Liquidation

203. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if he will confirm the net asset position of Irish Bank Resolution Corporation at 30 June 2012; in view of his Department's forecast of a net cost to the Exchequer in 2013 of €1 billion in respect of IBRC liquidation for the eligible liabilities guarantee, if he will confirm the loss being recorded at IBRC between 1 July 2012 and the date on which IBRC is finally would down in 2013. [9824/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I can advise the Deputy that the net asset position and consolidated statement of financial position of IBRC at 30 June 2012 is published on page 24 of IBRC's Interim Report 2012. The total cost of the liquidation is dependent on the value ascribed to the assets in the valuation process currently being conducted by the Special Liquidators. While claims of c.€1 billion are expected under the ELG Scheme it is too early to estimate what further costs are likely to be incurred until that process has been completed.

At this early stage of the special liquidation the Special Liquidators are engaged in intensive processes which involve, *inter alia*, asserting control over the businesses, processes, systems and personnel of IBRC. It is important that focus is placed on assessing, reorganising and re-structuring the day–to-day activities of the Bank to meet the primary objective of ensuring the purpose of the special liquidation is achieved, as this is key to ensuring that maximum value is extracted from the liquidation.

IBRC Liquidation

204. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance what will happen in June 2013 when the €3 billion loan from Bank of Ireland to Irish Bank Resolution Corporation, originally provided in June 2012, secured on a 2025 Government bond, falls due. [9825/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As part of the transactions relating to the Liquidation of IBRC, the bond repo agreement between IBRC and Bank of Ireland was terminated on a no gain/no loss basis and the Central Bank acquired the bond.

This 2025 Irish Government bond will be placed in the trading portfolio of the Central Bank, along with the bonds acquired in exchange for the Promissory Notes. The Central Bank will sell these bonds but only when such a sale is not disruptive to financial stability. The Central Bank have undertaken that minimum of bonds will be sold in accordance with the following schedule: €0.5bn by the end of 2014, €0.5bn per annum from 2015 to 2018, €1bn per annum from 2019 to 2023 and €2bn per annum from 2024 onwards.

IBRC Liquidation

205. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if he will outline the consideration given by him in the liquidation of Irish Bank Resolution Corporation to unsecured creditors taking legal action against IBRC and him, after assets in the form of promissory notes worth €27.7 billion at June 2012 were exchanged for bonds worth €25 billion, thereby wiping out IBRCs capital base. [9826/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Department of Finance received both internal and external legal advice in relation to the liquidation of Irish Bank Resolution Corporation. The legal advice received covered a wide range of issues, however, it would not be appropriate to comment further on the specifics of the advices received, which advices are subject to legal professional privilege.

Sale of State Assets

206. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if he will lay before Dáil Éireann the un-audited accounts of Irish Life for the year ended 31 December 2012. [9827/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I can inform the Deputy that it is not my intention to lay un-audited accounts of Irish Life for the year ended 31 December 2012 before Dáil Éireann and that there is no requirement to do so. I am willing to consider making public the audited accounts of Irish Life for the year ended 31 December 2012 when they become available.

The Deputy will be aware that the interim accounts for the six months ended 30 June 2012, which contain detailed financial information, are available on the Irish Life website.

Sale of State Assets

207. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the consideration he has given to using the proceeds from the sale of Irish Life, for a stimulus package aimed at reducing unemployment. [9828/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As was announced last week, the sale of Irish Life was a welcome development, representing the first time during the crisis that a company in which we have invested has been returned fully to private ownership. The sale of Irish Life, while benefiting the Exchequer by an estimated €1.3 billion, has a negligible impact on the General Government Balance (GGB) and I would like to make it clear that it is in GGB terms that our annual fiscal targets under the EU/IMF Programme are set.

Accordingly, directing a large amount of funds for expenditure on a stimulus package, equivalent to the amount of proceeds raised through the Irish Life sale, would have a severe negative impact on the 2013 GGB. This would most likely result in the State missing its annual deficit target and would endanger the economic recovery experienced to date.

The Government recognises that improving labour market conditions represents its biggest challenge, and, accordingly, is giving priority to job protection, job creation and supporting the unemployed. In this regard, the Minister for Enterprise, Jobs and Innovation recently published the 2013 Action Plan on Jobs, which seeks to address this important challenge.

Tax Collection

208. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide an analysis of outstanding unpaid corporation tax for the past five consecutive years; and if he will provide information as to the corporations liable for the outstanding sums. [9847/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that the details of the amounts of Corporation Tax that remained outstanding for each of the last five years are set out in the following table. These figures relate to each individual year and do not represent the cumulative totals at the end of each period.

	Total Revenue/ Net Receipts	Total Debt€m	Debt Under Appeal€m	Debt Available for Collection€m
Year ended 31 March 2012	4,218	177	112	65
Year ended 31 March 2011	3,500	331	244	87

	Total Revenue/ Net Receipts	Total Debt€m	Debt Under Appeal€m	Debt Available for Collection€m
Year ended 31 March 2010	3,944	315	247	68
Year ended 31 March 2009	3,889	364	273	91
Year ended 31 March 2008	5,071	219	77	142

Debt that is under appeal by the taxpayer is not available for collection until the issue(s) under appeal are resolved. The debt that is categorised as available for collection includes debt that is subject to phased payment arrangements and /or is subject to active collection, included collection enforcement.

I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that in line with their long-standing policy, and legislative provisions, details of the corporations liable for the outstanding liabilities may not be provided due to confidentiality obligations.

Tax Code

209. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Finance the means available to a person (details supplied) in County Kildare in relation to addressing recent correspondence they received from the Revenue Commissioners; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9852/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Pensions payable by the Department of Social Protection (DSP) have always been taxable but the amount of tax payable, if any, depends on the circumstances of the individual concerned, usually whether they have other sources of income. As I have previously informed the House, I have been advised by the Revenue Commissioners that following receipt of data from the DSP in late 2011 containing details of DSP pension payments, it emerged that some pensioners with significant other income had not previously declared their DSP pension for tax purposes. Revenue's approach was, firstly, to ensure that the record was correct for 2012 and thereafter to examine in detail the largest cases where there was a mismatch between their records and the DSP record, beginning with cases where annual non-DSP income exceeded €50,000. The information obtained from the initial examination would inform Revenue on how they would proceed with other higher risk cases. This follow-up project has been ongoing and Revenue is now corresponding with taxpayers who did not declare their DSP pension where they have annual non-DSP income of between €30,000 and €40,000.

This correspondence, which gives the taxpayer in question an opportunity to engage with Revenue, and, for example, to claim any unclaimed tax reliefs such as medical expenses etc., is in keeping with Revenue's normal practice. It also provides an opportunity to address the question of ability to pay which can only be determined when the actual liability outstanding has been established on foot of the submission of completed tax returns for the relevant years.

Financial Services Ombudsman Issues

210. **Deputy Jerry Buttimer** asked the Minister for Finance the reason the Financial Services Ombudsman was not in a position to investigate the case referred to him by a person

(details supplied) in County Cork in view of the difficulty that had not arisen until the maturity date of the policy and that it was only at the date of maturity that the difficulty became known to the policy holder; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9941/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Firstly, I must point out that the Financial Services Ombudsman is independent in the performance of his statutory functions and it would not be appropriate for me to comment on his work.

The Financial Services Ombudsman Bureau was established under the Central Bank and Financial Services Authority of Ireland Act 2004. This legislation provides the Financial Services Ombudsman with various powers in order to determine jurisdiction on a complaint. Included in this is a statutory timeframe, Section 57BX (3)(b) provides:-

"A consumer is not entitled to make a complaint if the conduct complained of - occurred more than 6 years before the complaint is made."

The legislation prohibits the Financial Services Ombudsman from examining any aspect of a complaint where the conduct being complained of occurred more than 6 years from receipt of the Complaint in his Office. If the conduct being complained of occurred 6 years before the complaint is submitted to the Financial Services Ombudsman, the Ombudsman has no discretion in examining such a case.

EU Funding

211. **Deputy Seán Kenny** asked the Minister for Finance if EU funding was received for the years 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012 for the purchase of additional resources or equipment for the Revenue Commissioners; the total cost of the new equipment; the cost of the equipment that was covered by the EU funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10002/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that EU funding for equipment was provided under the OLAF Hercule II programme. This funding is for action to combat fraud affecting the EU's financial interests, including cigarette smuggling and counterfeiting. Revenue received EU funding between 2009 and 2012 for the purchase of an X-Ray Container Scanner, a Tobacco Dog, a Mobile X-Ray Scanner Van and 3 Baggage X Ray scanners.

The X-Ray Container Scanner (2009) cost €1.49m. Revenue received EU funding towards this purchase of €375,000 in 2009 and €326,094 in 2010.

The Tobacco Dog (2012) cost €39,000. Revenue received a first payment of EU funding of €9,984 in 2012 towards this purchase.

The Mobile X-Ray Van (2012) cost €238,189. Revenue received a first payment of EU funding of €47,500 in 2012 towards this purchase.

The 3 Baggage X-Ray Scanners have not yet been purchased, however, in 2012 Revenue received a first payment of €22,500 towards their purchase.

The use of enforcement equipment such as mobile x-ray scanners, other detection technologies and dogs are an important part of a multi-faceted strategy employed by Revenue to tackle smuggling.

IBRC Staff

212. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Finance with regard to the liquidation of Irish bank Resolution Corporation persons who were employees of the corporation now find themselves effectively to be collateral damage, the remedial action being taken to ensure that their rights under previous agreements with the Government are not liquidated along with IBRC; the steps he will take to restore the value of the severance terms previously agreed in order that when their work is completed they are not placed at a further disadvantage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10050/13]

220. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Finance the steps he and his Department are taking to ensure that the severance terms previously agreed by his Department and the board of Irish Bank Resolution Corporation in respect of IBRC employees are honoured; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10225/13]

221. **Deputy Patrick Nulty** asked the Minister for Finance if he will a full breakdown of severance payments provided to the chief executive and former senior managers of the former Anglo Irish Bank; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10227/13]

222. **Deputy Patrick Nulty** asked the Minister for Finance the reason the new terms originally agreed with Irish Bank Resolution Corporation workers for redundancies have been changed; if he will set out the original terms of the redundancies, and the new proposals that are being put to staff; if he will agree to honour the agreed voluntary severance terms and if will agree to meet unions representing the IBRC workers. [10228/13]

232. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Finance the step he will take to restore the value of the severance terms previously agreed with the Irish Bank Resolution Corporation for the workers who have been affected by the recent appointment of a liquidator to IBRC to ensure fairness and equity following the Government's recent decision; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10418/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 212, 220 to 222, inclusive, and 232 together.

As the Deputy is aware, the legislation surrounding liquidation ranks employees as preferential creditors in respect of certain amounts owing to them on a winding up, including accrued wages and salaries, holiday pay, sick pay, statutory redundancy, pensions contributions and claims for damages arising from accidents. Any claims over and above that described above will rank as an unsecured claim in the liquidation process.

There are standard rules which apply to the distribution of the assets of companies in liquidation and it would not be appropriate for me to interfere with these rules. However the State does intervene to ensure that statutory redundancy is available through the Social Insurance Fund and that arrears of pay, sick pay, holiday pay or pay in lieu of statutory notice (limited to €600 per week up to a maximum of eight weeks) are payable from the Insolvency Payments Scheme. The Minister for Social Protection will rank as a preferential creditor of IBRC in respect of any payments made to employees of IBRC from the Social Insurance Fund or the Insolvency Payments Scheme.

Any action taken by the Minister which might divert the assets from IBRC creditors to employees, could be challenged in the Courts. I have been advised by the Special Liquidators that any voluntary severance scheme, that was in place prior to liquidation, is no longer operational.

The Special Liquidators were promptly in contact with staff on Thursday, 7 February and, unlike in other liquidations, the majority of employees have been re-hired by the special liquidators, for a minimum period of 3 months, to ensure an orderly wind-down of the business. In

addition some staff may in time be re-hired by NAMA or other purchasers of the assets. This should provide some reassurance to employees.

EU Regulations

213. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Finance his views on recent media reports that he is introducing regulations that will entitle the EU/ECB to extend the period during which they may review the taxation and expenditure decisions of our national parliament; and the reason he is doing this. [10103/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Irish Presidency of the Council of the EU has secured agreement, on behalf of euro area member countries, with the European Parliament and the European Commission, on two proposed regulations the "two-pack". One of the proposals is on the monitoring and assessment of draft budgetary plans and on ensuring the correction of excessive deficits. The other is on the strengthening of economic and budgetary surveillance and sets out explicit rules for enhanced surveillance of countries experiencing or threatened with financial difficulties. The agreement reached on 20 February will have to be approved by member countries and the European Parliament. The "two-pack" will be a significant and welcome enhancement of the euro area's economic governance regime. It is, to a great extent, a natural extension of the measures contained in the 'six-pack' which was introduced on 13 December, 2011. The 'six-pack' - comprising five regulations and one directive - reformed and strengthened fiscal surveillance under the *Stability and Growth Pact* and introduced new macroeconomic surveillance.

The 'two-pack' is applicable to euro area member countries only.

The proposed surveillance regulation provides for surveillance under a number of circumstances, specifically, where a member state is experiencing severe difficulties with regard to its financial stability and where this is likely to have adverse spillover effect on other Member States, where a member state is in a macroeconomic adjustment programme, and also post-programme surveillance. There are specific features attaching to each of these. However, in the case of enhanced surveillance, it is a matter for the Commission to decide every six months whether to prolong the enhanced surveillance. Under the regulation, a post-programme surveillance process will be put in place and maintained for a member country until the balance outstanding under EU-sourced financial assistance falls below 25% of the total. This covers all EU funding sources, including bilateral loans. It also provides that the Commission shall conduct, in liaison with the ECB, regular review missions in the Member State under post-programme surveillance to assess its economic, fiscal and financial situation.

The reports generated following such missions shall be considered by the European Council which - acting by qualified majority on a proposal from the Commission - may recommend to the Member State concerned to adopt corrective measures. The regulation provides that the duration of post-programme surveillance may be extended by the Council on a proposal from the Commission *"in the case of persistent risks to the financial or fiscal sustainability of the Member State concerned.* Post-programme surveillance is a normal feature of IMF assistance programmes, and this regulation provides for a similar arrangement for the EU.

The other proposed regulation concerns *'the monitoring and assessment of draft budgetary plans and on ensuring the correction of excessive deficits'* in euro area Member States. It will apply to all countries in the euro area, with special provisions including in relation to reporting requirements being made for those which are subject to an excessive deficit procedure. This draft regulation specifies that all euro area Member States, not in a macroeconomic adjustment

programme, will be required to submit to the Commission and the Eurogroup and make public a draft budgetary plan no later than 15 October each year. The draft budgetary plan will be assessed by the Commission, which shall adopt an opinion on it by the end of November. The draft regulation also provides that the Commission may request a revised draft budgetary plan in exceptional circumstances where it identifies particularly serious non-compliance with the budgetary obligations laid down in the Stability and Growth Pact.

This Government is firmly committed to reducing the deficit to below 3% by 2015 and to achieve a structural balance thereafter in line with the stability treaty. These regulations make no changes to these rules.

Property Taxation Collection

214. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Finance if it is his intention that the property tax will be payable in instalments using various mediums such as An Post, the banks, the credit union and PayPal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10115/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that commencing in March 2013 residential property owners will receive their Local Property Tax (LPT) Return from Revenue together with an LPT booklet, which will provide details of the payment options available to pay the tax. The LPT Return must be submitted and payment details provided to Revenue by 7 May, if using the paper return, and by 28 May if using Revenue's online facility. I am further advised by the Revenue Commissioners that there is a wide range of payment options available to liable persons, including the option to pay the tax for 2013 in equal instalments over the period 1 July 2013 to end December 2013. Instalment payments can be made by way of deduction at source from employment, occupational pension income or from certain payments made by the Departments of Social Protection and Agriculture, Food and the Marine. They can also be made by direct debit from current accounts in banks and other financial institutions including credit unions and can also be made in cash or by debit/credit card through approved payment service providers. I am advised that the Revenue Commissioners will shortly publish details of these approved payment service providers and they advise that they are currently negotiating with a number of organisations to provide cash payment facilities, including An Post.

The Revenue Commissioners also advise that there is no additional administration or interest charge imposed by Revenue where the phased payment options are adhered to. Normal transactional charges, however, may be levied by the property owner's financial institution or by a payment service provider where the property owner chooses to make their payment via a debit or credit card, direct debit or by way of cash payments. There is no charge where the payment is deducted at source.

Finally, I am satisfied that the range of payment options available to facilitate phased payment will allow liable persons choose whatever option suits their own particular circumstances.

Fuel Rebate Scheme

215. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance if Dublin Bus and Bus Éireann are both included in the fuel rebate scheme for bus and coach operators under the 2013 Finance Bill; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10154/13]

223. **Deputy Paul J. Connaughton** asked the Minister for Finance if he will consider ex-

tending the fuel rebate offered to coach operators to livestock hauliers in view of the importance of the cattle trade and in particular the live export trade, to maintain healthy competition within the sector and also to help ensure that these small family-run businesses can continue to operate and provide this vital service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10239/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 215 and 223 together.

The proposal to introduce an auto-diesel excise duty relief for licensed road hauliers that I announced in the Budget was, initially, confined to licensed and tax compliant hauliers.

Deputies will now be aware that I have extended the relief to the licensed passenger transport sector which would include Dublin Bus and Bus Éireann in the context of the Finance Bill published on 13 February. The maximum amount of the relief will be 7.5 cents per litre and will be price dependent.

Departmental Agencies Staff Remuneration

216. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide details of the payment of bonuses or other performance related payments and or allowances made to the staff of agencies under the aegis of his Department with a yearly breakdown from 2008 outlining the overall amount paid in each year period and the number of staff that received such payments and or allowances. [10165/13]

217. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide details of payments made to the CEO or equivalent of all agencies under the aegis of his Department including details of any bonuses, pension entitlements or any other remuneration paid to him or her in 2012. [10182/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 216 and 217 together.

In response to the Deputy's question details in respect of agencies under the remit of my Department are as follows:

Financial Services Ombudsman Bureau / Financial Services Ombudsman

In relation to the Financial Services Ombudsman Bureau / Financial Services Ombudsman no bonuses or performances related payments were made to any staff member since 2008.The only payment made to the Ombudsman (CEO) was a salary payment of €176,800 in line with his contract.The Financial Services Ombudsman Bureau pension contribution for the Ombudsman was €44,200 in 2012. The Financial Services Ombudsman has informed me that all of the above figures will be published in the 2012 Annual Report in due course.

Central Bank

Under the Central Bank Act 1942, the employment of staff at the Central Bank and their terms and conditions are matters for the Central Bank Commission.No performance related bonuses or allowances were paid to staff in the period January 2009 to present. No performance related bonuses were awarded to management in the period 2008 to present date.In December 2008, the majority of clerical, administrative and technical and general staff received annual performance related bonuses of €892 (fixed gross amount).

In respect of the pay of the Governor they have informed me that his salary was reduced to

€276,324 in 2010. During that year, the Governor surrendered €41,741 of his total salary to the Minister for Finance which resulted in an annual salary net of this amount of €234,583. In 2012, the Governor surrendered a total of €63,324 of his annual salary of €276,324 to the Minister for Finance which resulted in an annual salary net of this amount of €213,000.

Under the Central Bank's superannuation scheme, permanent bank staff obtain the same superannuation benefits as established civil servants. Patrick Honohan's pension entitlements do not extend beyond the standard entitlements in the model public sector defined benefit superannuation scheme.

Revenue Commissioners

I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that details of extra remuneration, exceptional performance awards and performance related pay are contained in the tables below:

Details of Extra Remuneration:

Category of Payment	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012 (Provisional)
Higher, special or additional duties:	851	531	472	476	442
Revenue Enforcement Allowance*	345	314	345	336	348
Shift and Roster Allowances:	183	171	177	179	174
Miscellaneous Allowances:	87	74	63	68	67

* The Revenue Enforcement Allowance is paid for flexibility and atypical attendance to staff involved the area of frontier control, shadow economy, enforcement/anti-smuggling/investigation/serious non-compliance activities.

Total amount paid in additional remuneration above

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012 (Provisional)
Total Amount	€4.419m	€4.181m	€4.141m	€4.332m	€3.992m

Exceptional Performance Awards:**

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012 (Provisional)
Individual Awards	238	621	1,038	1,121	1,088
Group Awards (No. of Staff)	22 (774)	34 (292)	20 (367)	8 (129)	4 (95)
Gross Amount	€452,078	€252,800	€305,578	€314,948	€165,077
Net of Tax	€285,177	€152,228	€183,793	€175,527	€103,574

**Under Revenue's administrative budget 0.2% of payroll was available in respect of ex gratia payments or other awards to individual staff members or groups of staff by way of recognition of exceptional performance of duty. It was used to encourage staff to improve service delivery, organisational efficiency or effectiveness. Payments are reported in Revenue's Annual Appropriation Account.

Assistant Secretary Performance Pay

	2008	2009
No. Of Recipients	16	Ceased from 2009
Total Amount	€196,900	

In addition the Revenue Commissioners have informed me that the Chairman's annual salary is €215,590, but in accordance with Government policy of a €200,000 pay ceiling for senior positions, salary in excess of €200,000 has been waived. The Chairman's pension entitlements are in accordance with normal civil service rules.

National Treasury Management Agency

Information in respect of performance related payments made to National Treasury Management Agency (NTMA) staff is set out in the table below. All National Asset Management Agency (NAMA) staff are NTMA employees and are included in the table below.

The NTMA employed a total of 500 staff as at the end of 2012.

Year	Total Amount of Performance Related Pay	Number of Staff who received Performance Related Pay
2012	€43,100	6
2011	€62,610	5
2010	€1,981,760	258
2009	€3,331,480	161
2008	€3,048,280	139

In addition the NTMA made total payments of €170,364 to 74 employees and €140,500 to 59 employees in relation to 2011 and 2012 respectively. These payments were to employees on lower salaries who contributed significant additional work hours. The NTMA does not have formal overtime payment arrangements in place for staff.

The remuneration details of the chief executives of the NTMA, National Development Finance Agency (NDFA) and NAMA are published in the annual reports of the relevant bodies.

The remuneration of the chief executives consists of basic salary, taxable benefits and a performance-related payment.The remuneration details for 2012 are as follows:

	NTMA	NDFA	NAMA
Basic Salary	€416,500	€297,000	€365,500
Performance-related Pay	Nil	Nil	Nil
Taxable Benefits	€29,600	€27,762	€22,664

The chief executives agreed to waive 15% of their salaries following a request by the Minister for Finance and the adjustment in each case is reflected in the above figures. The chief executives waived any consideration for performance-related pay in 2012 (as they did previously in 2011 and 2010).

The chief executives' pension entitlements do not extend beyond the standard entitlements in the model public sector defined benefit superannuation scheme.

Financial Services Ombudsman Issues

218. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Finance if he will review the situation whereby in the case of alleged miss-selling of endowment mortgages the consumer is not entitled to make a complaint to the Financial Services Ombudsman because of the six year rule; his views on whether it would be more appropriate that, in this case, the six year period run from the date of maturity of the policy rather than the date of commencement of the policy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10197/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Firstly, I must point out that the Financial Services Ombudsman is independent in the performance of his statutory functions and it would not be appropriate for me to comment on his work.

The Financial Services Ombudsman Bureau was established under the Central Bank and Financial Services Authority of Ireland Act 2004. This legislation provides the Financial Services Ombudsman with various powers in order to determine jurisdiction on a complaint. Included in this is a statutory timeframe, Section 57BX (3)(*b*) provides:-

"A consumer is not entitled to make a complaint if the conduct complained of - occurred more than 6 years before the complaint is made."

The legislation prohibits the Financial Services Ombudsman from examining any aspect of a complaint where the conduct being complained of occurred more than 6 years from receipt of the Complaint in his Office. If the conduct being complained of occurred 6 year before the complaint is submitted to the Financial Services Ombudsman, the Ombudsman has no discretion in examining such a case.

I understand from the Central bank that where the proceeds of an endowment policy are insufficient to repay the capital element of an endowment mortgage, borrowers should be given ample time to make alternative repayment arrangements. Borrowers are afforded the protections of the 'Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears' in cases where the mortgage is in arrears or in pre-arrears and is secured by the borrower's primary residence.

When the risks associated with endowment mortgage products were highlighted in the 1990s, specific provisions were incorporated into the Consumer Credit Act 1995 which require warnings to the effect that the proceeds of a policy may not be sufficient to repay a mortgage.

Under the provisions of the Act, endowment mortgage savings plans must be reviewed by the life company at least every five years to check if the plan is on track to repay the mortgage. A statement setting out the estimated revised valuation of the endowment policy at maturity must be issued by the insurer to the borrower. If the policy is not on track to repay the mortgage, the life company will recommend an increase in the premium.

Tax Reliefs Application

219. **Deputy Robert Dowds** asked the Minister for Finance if tobacco companies with operations here availed of the tax credit for research and development expenditure in any of the past three years for which figures are available. [10203/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that their obligation to observe confidentiality for taxpayers and small groups of taxpayers precludes them from providing the information requested.

Questions Nos. 220 to 222, inclusive, answered with Question No. 212.

Question No. 223 answered with Question No. 215.

Property Taxation Exemptions

224. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Finance the mechanism for persons who own a house or property that was modified and grant aided by a local authority to cater for a person with a physical disability, the way this would apply to them in relation to the new property tax; and where the relevant guidelines on this will be available. [10250/13]

226. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Finance his views on correspondence regarding property tax exemptions (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10257/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 224 and 226 together.

Section 6 of the Finance (Local Property Tax) (Amendment) Bill 2013 provides for a reduction in the market value of a residential property that has been adapted for occupation by a disabled person where the adaptation has been grant-aided by a local authority. In addition to the payment of the local authority grant, two other conditions must be met, to qualify for the reduction. Firstly, the person with the disability must occupy the property as his or her sole or main residence after the adaptation is completed. Secondly, the liable person in relation to the property must notify the Revenue Commissioners in writing of the amount of the chargeable value that is attributable to the adaptation along with any relevant documentation. The reduction in value is limited to the lesser of the chargeable value attributable to the adaptation work carried out on the property and the maximum grant payable under the relevant local authority scheme. This chargeable value is to be used in relation to subsequent valuations of the property, unless additional grant-aided work is carried out. The relief ends on the sale or transfer of a property that has been adapted, unless the person with the disability continues to reside in the property. Guidance on how to avail of this relief, together with any additional information will be available on the Revenue website, www.revenue.ie shortly.

In accordance with Section 2 of the Finance (Local Property Tax) (Amendment) Bill 2013, an exemption from the charge to LPT will apply to a residential property purchased, built or

adapted to make it suitable for occupation by a permanently and totally incapacitated individual as their sole or main residence, where an award has been made by the Personal Injuries Assessment Board or a court, or where a trust has been established, specifically for the benefit of such individuals. In the case of adaptations to a property, the exemption will only apply where the cost of the adaptations exceeds 25% of the chargeable value of the property before it is adapted. The exemption ends if the property is sold and the incapacitated individual no longer occupies it as his or her sole or main residence.

For individuals on low incomes or those whose only income source is from the Department of Social Protection, the Finance (Local Property Tax) Act 2012 and the Finance (Local Property Tax) (Amendment) Bill 2013 provide for the possibility of deferring the charge in certain cases of inability to pay. Details of the existing deferral arrangements are available on Revenue's website www.revenue.ie , where the Commissioners have recently published a useful Guide to Local Property Tax. This will be revised shortly to take account of the provisions of the Finance (Local Property Tax) (Amendment) Bill 2013.

It should be noted, however, that the provisions in the Finance (Local Property Tax) (Amendment) Bill 2013 to which I refer are subject to its enactment.

IBRC Liquidation

225. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance if he will outline what will happen to the mortgages of citizens in the now defunct Irish Bank Resolution Corporation and Irish nationwide; his views on whether these mortgage holders will have their loans transferred to another financial institution; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10254/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised that the contractual terms and conditions of customer mortgages and other borrowings will not change as a result of the appointment of the Special Liquidators and all debts owing to IBRC will remain due and enforceable. It is important that, to avoid breaches of their obligations, customers continue to make payments on their loans and otherwise honour the contractual obligations of their borrowings. As part of the role of the liquidators, the assets of IBRC will be valued independently before being sold. Any assets not sold to third parties (including loan counterparties and other financial institutions) at or above the valuation price will be sold to NAMA at the independent valuation. The Special Liquidators are still in the process of devising and implementing a sales process in respect of IBRC's assets including the mortgage portfolio.

Question No. 226 answered with Question No. 224.

State Banking Sector

227. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of retired executives of AIB including EBS who have been written to by the bank asking that they consider voluntarily forgoing a portion of their pension; the number who responded positively, negatively, or not at all; the number of the retired executives who have since actually foregone some of their pension entitlement and the overall value of the pensions entitlements that have been foregone by retired executives of the bank. [10296/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Deputy will be aware that AIB has previously confirmed that it has written to former senior executives of both AIB and EBS Limited requesting a voluntary reduction in their pension levels.

The Bank has informed me that is not disclosing the names of these individuals on confidentiality grounds, but that it has to date issued in excess of thirty letters. AIB is not in a position to release information on former employees without the express consent of the individuals.

Given this is an on-going complicated process from a tax, legal and Revenue perspective the Bank is not in a position to confirm the levels of reductions achieved to date.

State Banking Sector

228. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of retired executives of Bank of Ireland, if any that have been written to by the bank asking that they consider voluntarily forgoing a portion of their pension; the number that responded positively, negatively, or not at all; the number of the retired executives have since actually foregone some of their pension entitlement; and the overall value of the pensions entitlements that have been foregone by retired executives of the bank. [10297/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As the Deputy is aware, I have no role in the day-to-day commercial and operational decisions of Bank of Ireland. These decisions are taken by the board and management of the institution. Notwithstanding the fact that the State is a minority shareholder in Bank of Ireland, the Minister must ensure that the bank is run on a commercial, cost effective and independent basis to ensure the value of the banks as assets to the State, as per the Memorandum on Economic and Financial Policies agreed with the EU Commission, the ECB and the IMF. The Relationship Frameworks with the banks provide that the State will not intervene in the day-to-day operations of the banks or their management decisions.

These frameworks are published on the Department of Finance website at http://banking.finance.gov.ie/presentations-and-latest-documents/.

The Bank has advised me:-

"that it has commenced a process of engagement in connection with the deficits in defined benefit pension schemes to which the Bank is sponsor.

The Bank will not be commenting on aspects of this engagement unless it considers it necessary to do so as part of the wider engagement process or is considered appropriate as a market reporting obligation or a market update objective."

State Banking Sector

229. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of retired executives of Permanent TSB, if any that have been written to by the bank asking that they consider voluntarily forgoing a portion of their pension;the number that responded positively, negatively, or not at all; the number of retired executives that have since actually foregone some of their pension entitlement and the overall value of the pensions entitlements that have been foregone by retired executives of the bank. [10298/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by Permanent TSB that the bank has not to date written to retired executives asking them to consider forgoing a portion of their pensions. However the bank has also advised that it is currently undertaking a fundamental review of its staff pension schemes and will be consulting with the staff and the pension scheme trustees over the coming months on the level of benefits payable from the schemes.

IBRC Staff

230. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of retired executives of Irish Bank Resolution Corporation in special liquidation, if any that had been written to by the bank prior to the appointment of a special liquidator asking that they consider voluntarily forgoing a portion of their pension; the number that responded positively, negatively, or not at all; the number of the retired executives that have since actually foregone some of their pension entitlement and the overall value of the pensions entitlements that have been foregone by retired executives of the bank. [10299/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I have been informed that as far as the Special Liquidators are aware, retired executives had not been written to by IBRC requesting that they consider voluntarily foregoing a portion of their pension.

Tax Code

231. **Deputy Seamus Healy** asked the Minister for Finance if he will outline the details of the legislation underpinning the importation of motor homes here; the details of changes made in recent years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10320/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that the provisions in primary legislation relating to the importation of motor homes and the charging of Vehicle Registration Tax (VRT) are contained in the Finance Act 1992. Statutory Instrument No. 318 of 1992 (as amended by S.I. 400 of 2010) requires that a person, who is not an authorised person, and who imports a vehicle, must have the vehicle examined not later than 7 days after its arrival in the State. The vehicle must be registered not later than 30 days after its arrival in the State. An appointment to have the vehicle examined should be made at a National Car Testing Centre, details of which are contained on the Revenue website at http://www.revenue.ie/en/tax/vrt/faqs-vrt.html#section3.

Section 130 of the Finance Act 1992 (as amended by Section 102 of the Finance Act 2010) provided for the introduction, from 1 January 2011, of a revised classification system for the assessment of VRT. This system uses the EU classification system for motor vehicles. Under this system, motor homes with an EU vehicle classification of M ("motor vehicles designed and constructed primarily for the carriage of persons and their luggage") and EU body type SA ("Special Purpose Vehicles, motor caravans") are charged VRT at 13.3% of the open market selling price of the vehicle in the State.

Prior to the adoption of the EU vehicle classification system in 2011, motor homes were charged VRT on the basis of a combination of factors including unladen weight and height. Depending on its specifications, a motor home could have been classified as a Category A (higher rate of VRT), Category B (lower rate of VRT) or Category C (fixed amount of VRT) vehicle.

Question No. 232 answered with Question No. 212.

Property Taxation Application

233. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Finance if he will, in the interests of impartial information provision and clarity, request that Revenue ensure that the letters to be distributed to property owners outlining their estimated local property tax liability will also contain the exact band into which their property falls which has been used to calculate the liability; and

if he will make a statement on the matter. [10420/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Finance (Local Property Tax) Act 2012 sets out how the tax is to be administered, how a residential property is to be valued for LPT purposes and provides for the making of a Revenue Estimate. I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that LPT is a self-assessment tax, so in the first instance, it is a matter for the property owner to calculate the tax due based on his or her assessment of the chargeable value of the property. I would like to clarify that the Revenue Commissioners will not be involved, as a matter of routine, in valuing individual properties. As part of the general issue of Returns, beginning in March 2013, property owners will also receive an information booklet and a Revenue Estimate of LPT. The Revenue Estimate is not based on a valuation of each owner's individual property, nor should it be regarded as an accurate calculation of the amount of LPT that they should pay. Once the property owner meets his or her obligations by valuing the property, submitting the Return and advising Revenue of his or her payment method within the relevant time limits, the Revenue Estimate of LPT notified to the owner is no longer relevant. However, if the property owner considers that the amount shown on the Notice of Estimate accurately reflects his or her self-assessment, he or she should complete the Return on that basis, select a payment option and submit the Return.

The Commissioners are actively preparing valuation guidance which, taken together with the owner's own knowledge of the property, will assist him or her in assessing its value. The guidance will include an on-line guide that will provide indicative property valuation bands depending on the property type, age and location, and it will be available on the Revenue website prior to the issue of Returns to property owners. The guidance will also draw property owners' attention to the publicly available property price register produced by the Property Services Regulatory Authority which provides an actual sales price for all properties sold in the State since January 2010. As I have previously advised the House, where the Revenue guidance is used in an honest manner, the property valuation made by a property owner will not be challenged by Revenue in accordance with its normal Customer Service Charter.

Broadband Services Provision

234. **Deputy Derek Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the time frame within which schools in County Galway will be connected to high speed broadband; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9776/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): All recognised post primary schools in Galway have been connected to the Schools High Speed 100 Mbit/s Broadband Network, with the exception of Gairmscoil Fheichin Naofa, Corr na Mona, which is due to be installed by early March 2013.

Under the Schools Broadband Access Programme the Department provides for the supply of internet connectivity for all recognised primary schools in Galway. All contracts under the Schools Broadband Access Programme were recently re-tendered under a public procurement competition. As a result of this the number of service providers has been expanded from 6 to 13 with the aim of ensuring that where available that a preferred solution would be awarded to a school. These contracts were signed in the summer and the migration of schools onto the new services is currently under way.

The Department is aware of the difficulty that some schools have with their broadband service. Through the public procurement process the Department has sought as far as possible to reduce the reliance on slower services and the number of schools reliant on a satellite con-

nection has fallen from approximately 1,800 in 2005 to approximately 250 at present. Satellite connections and some other slower connections have only been awarded where no other solution was proposed and contracts for these connections have only been awarded for one year. In the case of Galway there are 4 schools connected by satellite. These schools will be re-tendered next summer and in the interim the Department will liaise with service providers to try and ensure that where possible improved connections will be made available.

Teachers' Remuneration

235. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the fact that PRSI contributions in respect of accrued holiday pay, covering actual school holiday weeks, is not appearing on substitute teachers' P60s at the end of the financial year; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the Department of Social Protection is counting such holiday weeks in the case of substitute teachers therefore denying such teachers the opportunity of receiving credits (details supplied); if he will acknowledge that this situation is leaving such teachers in a precarious position in respect of their future pensions and or social welfare claims; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9542/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): In the case of teachers who obtain part-time hours in a casual /non-casual capacity in post primary schools, the rate of pay is based on the annual rates of pay divided by 735 hours (maximum teaching contact hours per annum) to get an hourly rate, as opposed to the annual rate of pay divided by 365 and multiplied by the hours worked plus 8% holiday pay. This ensures that qualified part-time teachers are paid the equivalent of the full time rate of pay over the shorter period of time. The rate was agreed in negotiations with the teacher unions.

PRSI contributions are deducted for periods of employment. Part time casual and non-casual teachers are not employed during school holiday periods and therefore PRSI contributions are not paid for these periods.

Student Grant Scheme Design

236. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 317 of 5 February 2013, and in the context of whether an applicant can be considered appropriate for assessment as an independent mature candidate, if the year of first entry to an approved course means the year of entry to a postgraduate course if that is the course the applicant is now pursuing following completion of an undergraduate course or if it always refers to the year of entry to the undergraduate course. [9558/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): In the absence of all of the details that would be contained in an individual's application form, it is not possible for me to say how a student should be assessed.

However, from the scenario presented by the Deputy, it would appear that the student is progressing from an undergraduate to a postgraduate course. In such circumstances, the year of entry for student grant purposes means the year of entry at undergraduate level.

School Enrolments

237. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position

regarding school places in an area (details supplied) in Dublin 3; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9571/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The question of enrolment in individual schools is the responsibility of the managerial authority of those schools. My Department's main responsibility is to ensure that schools in an area can, between them, cater for all pupils seeking places. In that regard, during the past two years my Department has provided funding towards additional accommodation and refurbishment works to both of the schools referred to by the Deputy. These projects have now been completed.

It is the responsibility of the managerial authorities of schools that are not in a position to admit all pupils seeking entry to implement an enrolment policy in accordance with the Education Act 1998. In this regard a board of management may deem it necessary to restrict enrolment to children from a particular age group or to children living in a particular area or on the basis of some other criterion. Some schools use parish or other boundaries for this purpose.

The selection process and the enrolment policy on which it is based is matter for the individual school authority. In formulating an enrolment policy a school must, however, ensure it is lawful and applied fairly to all applicants.

Under section 15 (2) (d) of the Education Act 1998, each school is legally obliged to disclose its enrolment policy and to ensure that as regards that policy that principles of equality and the rights of parents to send their children to a school of the parents' choice are respected.

Section 29 of the Education Act 1998, provides parents with an appeal process where a board of management of a school or a person acting on behalf of the Board refuses enrolment to a student. Where a school refuses to enrol a pupil, the school is obliged to inform parents of their right under Section 29 of the Education Act 1998 to appeal that decision to either the relevant Vocational Educational Committee or to the Secretary General of my Department.

The National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) is the statutory agency which can assist parents who are experiencing difficulty in securing a school place for their child. The Board can be contacted at National Educational Welfare Board, National Headquarters, 16-22 Green Street, Dublin 7 or by telephone at 01-8738700.

Teacher Training Provision

238. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reasons for the change in procedure whereby B.Ed students of a college (details supplied) in County Limerick now pay for two weeks attendance at Irish College during first and second year when this cost was included in colleges fees heretofore; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9626/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): As part of the Government's budgetary considerations and the Comprehensive Expenditure Review carried out in 2011, a decision was made to abolish the payments by this Department towards the cost of attendance at Gaeltacht courses by students commencing their programme of primary initial teacher education. The decision came into effect for the 2012/13 academic year. As the Deputy will be aware, priority is being given to protecting resources for front line services in the coming years.

To assist with the costs of the Gaeltacht placement, primary initial teacher education students who are in receipt of a student grant which includes a 100% fee grant, or who would have qualified for a full fee grant but for the Free Fees Schemes, can apply for funding towards travel

and accommodation costs under the field trip element of a fee grant, subject to the normal terms and conditions of the student grant scheme.

Apart from the student grant system, in circumstances of particular need students may apply for support under the Student Assistance Fund which assists students in third-level institutions in exceptional financial need. Information on the fund is available through the Access Officer in the third level institution attended.

Redundancy Payments

239. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the cost of redundancy payments to special needs assistants in primary schools for the past five years; if he will provide a numerical breakdown of the number of SNAs made redundant in each of those years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9632/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Details on the cost of redundancy payments and the number of SNAs who received a redundancy payment annually for the years 2008-2012 is contained in the attached document. These figures include both full redundancy payments and compensation for loss of hours ('partial redundancies').

It is not possible to give an exact breakdown of the redundancy payments between the Primary and Post Primary levels but, on average, 87% of all redundancy payments are issued to those in Primary schools with the remaining 13% issued to those in Post Primary schools.

The attached figures do not include redundancy payments issued to SNAs in VEC schools. This information would have to be obtained by the Deputy from the individual VECs.

SNA Redundancy Payments	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Number of Payments	261	304	419	620	1,252
Amount Paid in Redundancy Payments	€1,806,920	€2,477,805	€2,908,684	€4,926,326	€10,116,505

Disadvantaged Status

240. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason a school (details supplied) in County Donegal is not currently designated for DEIS; if the school has applied in recent times for DEIS in order to be designated for DEIS status; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9690/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Following an independent identification process in 2005, 875 schools were selected for inclusion in DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools).

The school to which the Deputy refers was among a number of schools that was judged not to have a sufficient level of disadvantage to warrant inclusion in DEIS. Furthermore, an appeal by this school to the independent review body confirmed that the level of disadvantage did not warrant the school's inclusion in the DEIS process.

My Department has not received an application for inclusion in DEIS since the appeal was made in 2006.

A key priority for my Department is to continue to prioritise and target resources in schools with the most concentrated levels of educational disadvantage. That challenge is significant given the current economic climate and the target to reduce public expenditure. This limits the capacity for any additionality, or inclusion of further schools, in the DEIS programme.

Student Grant Scheme Applications

241. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a full maintenance grant will be approved by Student Universal Support Ireland in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Carlow. [9719/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Officials in my Department have confirmed with Student Universal Support Ireland that the student referred to by the Deputy has had his application reviewed and a revised award letter issued on 20th February 2013.

School Accommodation

242. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding additional classrooms for a school (details supplied) in County Wicklow; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9739/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The school referred to by the Deputy has recently been approved devolved funding to build a 2 classroom extension under my Department's Additional Accommodation Scheme 2013.

Student Grant Scheme Applications

243. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will expedite a student grant in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9777/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Officials in my Department have confirmed with Student Universal Support Ireland, that on 12th February 2013, 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.

Teacher Recruitment

244. **Deputy Dominic Hannigan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to make sure graduate teachers are offered substitution positions in preference to retired teachers when there is availability of graduate teachers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9813/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Circular 31/2011 details a cascade of measures for recruitment of teachers, prioritising unemployed registered teachers over retired registered teachers and registered teachers over unregistered persons. It is impor-

tant to note that schools themselves employ teachers and not the Department of Education and Skills. Ultimately, the decision lies with the principal or board of management of the school.

Under the current Circulars, each principal must report to his or her board of management on a regular basis on the fact that a list of unemployed registered teachers is being maintained, and the circumstances in which he or she has had to engage a registered teacher in receipt of a pension under a public service pension scheme or an unregistered person.

From January 2011 teachers who are in receipt of a pension and who return to teaching are remunerated at the first point of the relevant salary scales applicable to new entrants. This represents a significant financial disincentive for teachers who retired at the top of their salary scale, often with a post of responsibility allowance, to return to teaching.

Student Grant Scheme Eligibility

245. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason a higher education grant was not awarded to a person (details supplied) in Dublin 11; if he will address the points raised by this applicant that this student is totally independent of their parent but fail to qualify for higher education grant assistance based on their means; if the regulations governing the grant assessment and payment are wholly unfair in this case; if there are exceptions to the provision and if a grant will be awarded to this person. [9846/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The Deputy will appreciate that in the absence of all of the relevant details that would be contained in an individual's application it would not be possible for me to say whether or not a student should qualify for a grant.

However, to be assessed independently of their parents, students under the age of 23 must present compelling independent evidence of estrangement to the grant awarding authority. The type of independent evidence includes a letter from a social worker or other appropriate officer of the Health Service Executive explaining the circumstances of the estrangement. Confirmation that a candidate is living separately from his/her parents/guardians is not sufficient.

If an individual applicant considers that she/he has been unjustly refused a student grant, she/he may appeal, in the first instance, to the appeals officer in SUSI.

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

Schools Building Projects Status

246. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he has identified a site or has plans to relocate a school (details supplied) in County Wexford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9853/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The school, referred to by the Deputy, has applied to my Department for large scale capital funding. 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.

As outlined in the Five Year Plan that I announced on 9 March 2012 last, the delivery of major school projects required to meet demographic demand will be the main focus for capital investment in the coming years. Due to the financial constraints imposed by the need to prioritise available funding to meet future demographic demands, it has not been possible to advance all applications for capital funding concurrently. The Deputy will appreciate that the primary aim at the core of the Five Year Plan, is to ensure that every child will have access to a physical school place.

Schools Building Projects Status

247. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he has considered an application from a school (details supplied) in County Wexford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9854/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The school referred to by the Deputy has submitted an application for funding under my Department's Emergency Works Scheme to replace windows at the school.

The school authority has been requested to provide clarification in relation to their application and as soon as this clarification is received their application will receive further consideration. The school authority will be informed of the decision as quickly as possible.

Appointments to State Boards

248. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will list the membership of the student grants appeals board; their qualifications and appropriateness for the position; the criteria used to appoint them; how often they meet; the cost of this board; the persons that provide the administrative support and back-up to the board; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9876/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I established the Student Grants Appeals Board (Appeals Board) on 8 September 2011 in accordance with Section 25 of the Student Support Act 2011. The Appeals Board is independent in the performance of its functions. It comprises of a Chairperson and six ordinary members, all appointed in their individual capacities based on their knowledge and expertise.

The membership of the Appeals Board is as follows:-

Ms. Maureen Waldron, Chairperson, former Director in the Department of Social Protection; Mr. Pádraic McNamara (vice-Chair), former Chief Executive Officer of the State Examinations Commission; Dr. Marie Clarke, Lecturer, School of Education at UCD; Ms. Rebecca Murphy, former Student Union Welfare Officer, University College Cork; Ms. Eithne Frost, Consultant in the Voluntary Sector; Ms. Brenna Clarke, retired Professor of English at St. Patrick's College of Education; Professor Kevin Ryan, former Registrar of the University of Limerick.

Prior to an applicant making an appeal to the Appeals Board, an initial appeal in writing to the relevant awarding authority is provided for under the Student Support Act 2011. This provides for a review of the decision by an appeals officer of the grant awarding authority, independently of the original assessment process. If, after this initial appeal, the grant applicant still remains of the view that the scheme has not been interpreted correctly in his/her case, an appeal form outlining the position may be submitted by the applicant to the independent Stu-

dent Grants Appeals Board. The Appeals Board is fully independent in the performance of its functions. The inaugural sitting of the Appeals Board took place on 7th October 2011. Since that date the Appeals Board has sat on 20 occasions over a 16 month period to consider appeals. Appeals are received on an on-going basis throughout an academic year. Since its establishment, the Appeals Board sittings have taken place at intervals varying from 2 to 4 weeks: the frequency of sittings is determined by the volume of appeals submitted and the requirement that the Appeals Board make a determination on the appeal within the 60 day timeframe specified in the Student Support Act 2011.

Since its establishment in 2011, the following amounts have issued to the Appeals Board members:-

- Allowances - €15,450.00;

- Travel and Subsistence - €6,591.61. Total paid for 2011 and 2012 (as at 20 Feb 13) €22,041.61*

*Claims in respect of attendance at the December 2012 sitting have yet to be claimed or paid.

Administrative support to the Appeals Board is provided by my Department.

School Enrolments

249. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of children who were no more than five years of age when they first enrolled and attended primary school in each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9897/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): We collect information on primary children by the year that they were born rather than by date of birth. Please see the attached table with the number of 4 and 5 year old children enrolled from 2007-2011.

Year	Age	Mainstream Pupils
2007	4	26256
2007	5	36043
2008	4	26932
2008	5	37415
2009	4	25894
2009	5	38027
2010	4	25016
2010	5	37947
2011	4	26768
2011	5	41126

School Enrolments

250. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of children who were no more than four years old when they first enrolled and attended primary school in each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9898/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): We collect information on

primary children by the year that they were born rather than by date of birth. Please see the following table with the number of 4 year old children enrolled from 2007-2011.

Year	Age	Mainstream Pupils
2007	4	26256
2008	4	26932
2009	4	25894
2010	4	25016
2011	4	26768

Early Child Care Education Issues

251. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason an apparent policy is being pursued of facilitating public primary schools for extensions for early childhood care and education rooms in view of the consequent displacement of a significant number of community and private child care facilities which exist, many of which have been funded under EOCP; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9900/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): My Department does not have a policy of encouraging schools to set up pre-school services in competition with services that have been funded through the EOCP or its successor programme. If the Deputy knows of schools where this has occurred, perhaps she could bring them to my attention.

Student Grant Scheme Design

252. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will consider changing the student grant scheme so that mortgage repayments are considered in the means test for grant eligibility due to there being an increasing number of families that have suffered drastic reductions in means under the burden of substantial home mortgage payments that have not reduced or that may have increased as a result of recent hikes in interest rates; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9902/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The assessment of means under my Department's student grant scheme is based on gross income from all sources. Therefore, all income is assessed from the same starting point, eliminating any distortion which might arise from different spending decisions.

I have no plans at present to change this arrangement in respect of the determination of income for grant purposes.

Schools Building Projects Status

253. **Deputy Emmet Stagg** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the tender has now been awarded to the successful

be on site and the timeframe stipulated in the contract for the completion of the work. [9928/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I am pleased to advise the Deputy that my Department has recently authorised the issue of the letter of intent to the preferred bidder. The contractor must now produce certain documentation such as a bond, insurances, tax clearance etc. Subject to receipt of all the required documentation and provided no further issues arise, it is anticipated that the contractor will commence on site later this year and the project will be completed in quarter 2.

Student Grant Scheme Design

254. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on a submission (details supplied); his plans to address the concerns raised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9935/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The Deputy will be aware that a dedicated capital assets test imp

lementation group was established to bring forward detailed implementation proposals on new means testing arrangements for student grants, to include the value of assets. No decisions have been taken in relation to the inclusion of farm or other business assets in any new means testing arrangements.

I have received a draft report from the implementation group. This is currently under consideration and I will consult further with my cabinet colleagues. Any proposals in this regard will require Government agreement and necessitate legislative amendment.

School Enrolments

255. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the review of school enrolment policies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9949/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The Deputy will be aware that in 2011, I launched a discussion paper on school enrolment. The "Discussion Paper on a Regulatory Framework for School Enrolment" contains suggestions on how to make the process of enrolling in schools more open, equitable and consistent and is available on my Department's website.

I also invited education partners and interested parties to submit their views to my Department. The feedback from this consultation has helped inform the nature and scope of a new regulatory framework for school enrolment.

I intend to bring legislative proposals to Government this year, the primary aim of which will be to ensure that every child is treated fairly and that every child has a place at school**.**

School Curriculum

256. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will provide an update on proposals to bring in politics as a leaving certificate subject; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9950/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): A syllabus for Politics and Society as a new subject in the Leaving Certificate was submitted to my Department by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment in May 2011.

The implementation issues are being examined at present in the context of overall system priorities and resources.

Student Grant Scheme Applications

257. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a grant application to Student Universal Support Ireland will be expedited in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Carlow. [9964/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Officials in my Department have confirmed with Student Universal Support Ireland that the student referred to by the Deputy has been awarded a grant and an award letter issued on 20th February, 2013.

Education Schemes

258. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the total number of participants on the springboard initiative to date; the total number of participants aged under 25 years and the total number of participants under 25 years and unemployed for 12 months or more prior to participating in the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10015/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The information requested is being currently being compiled and will be forwarded to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Education Schemes

259. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the total number of participants on the back to education initiative in 2012; the total number of participants aged under 25 years and the total number under 25 years and unemployed for 12 months or more prior to participating in the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10016/13]

260. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the total number of participants on the VTOS programme in 2012; the total number of participants aged under 25 years and the number aged under 25 years and unemployed for 12 months or more prior to participating in the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10017/13]

261. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the total number of participants on post leaving certificate courses in 2012; the total number of participants aged under 25 years and the total number aged under 25 years and unemployed for 12 months prior to participating in the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10018/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): I propose to take Questions Nos. 259 to 261, inclusive, together.

Statistics on the programmes referred to by the Deputy are provided in the following table.As the 2012 statistics for BTEI and VTOS are not yet available figures for 2011 have been provided.

The PLC statistics provided are for the 2012/2013 academic year. A figure for the number of unemployed participants in PLC is not included as this information has not been received from all VECs. However my Department is aware from consultations with the Department of Social Protection that there are 8,169 participants in PLC in receipt of a Back To Education Allowance (BTEA). My Department does not have a breakdown on the number of unemployed participants by age as this is not currently being collected by VECs. Arrangements are being made to have full data on participants in all further education programmes returned by VECs to my Department for future years.

	Programme:	BTEI	VTOS	PLC
	Year:	2011	2011	2012/13
Total number of participants		32,030	5,650	35,609

Total number of participants aged under 25		4,835	945	24,643
Total number unemployed		12,638	4,211*	-
Total number unemployed for 12 months or more		8,100	2,929	-

* Had been in receipt of JA/JB. The remaining learners had been in receipt of One Parent Family Payment or Disability Allowance etc.

Education and Training Provision

262. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the total number of participants on the local training initiative in 2012; the total number of participants aged under 25 years and the total number aged under 25 years and unemployed for 12 months prior to participating in the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10019/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): This is a day to day operational matter for FÁS. The information the Deputy sought is not readily available. I have asked FÁS to collate this data as soon as possible. When received I will forward directly to the Deputy.

Education and Training Provision

263. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the total number of participants on national traineeship programme in 2012; the total number of participants aged under 25 years and the total number aged under 25 years and unemployed for 12 months prior to participating in the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10020/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): This is a day to day operational matter for FÁS. The information the Deputy sought is set out in the following table, which has been provided by FÁS.

In Training (December 2012) - Throughput (December 2012)

Under 25 years	25 years & Over	TOTAL	Under 25 and unemployed for over 12 Months prior to starting scheme	Under 25 years	25 years & Over	Total	Under 25 and unemployed for over 12 Months prior to starting scheme	Under 25 years	25 years & Over	Total	Under 25 and unemployed for over 12 Months prior to starting scheme

Train-ee-ship	5,234	2,186	566	1,045	1,366	2,411	283	1,141	1,682	2,823	283

Notes:
1. Beneficiaries refers to the numbers of participants in training as 31st December 2012 plus the throughput for 2012.2. Throughput refers to the number of persons that finished their programmes

Education and Training Provision

264. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the total number of participants on wider horizon programme in 2012; the total number of participants aged under 25 years and the total number aged under 25 years and unemployed for 12 months prior to participating in the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10021/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): This is a day to day operational matter for FÁS.

I understand that a total of 609 individuals participated in the Wider Horizons Programme in 2012. Of the 609 who participated, 218 were from the Republic of Ireland. Of the 218 who participated in the Republic of Ireland, 15 were over 25 and 203 were under 25. 35 participants under 25 were unemployed for 12 months or more.

Labour Market Issues

265. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the total number of participants on labour market activation programme run in 2010 and 2011 in 2012 who were under 25 years; the total number aged under 25 years and unemployed for 12 months prior to participating in the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10022/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): The Labour Market Activation Fund was launched in 2010 and its programmes completed in June 2011. Project providers were asked to capture the number of participants completing programmes on an under and over 35s basis. Of those who successfully completed programmes, some 6,781 were under the age of 35. In line with the eligibility criteria for this Fund, all participants had to be unemployed for more than 3 months in order to participate in the programme. Projects were not required to capture the number of participants who were unemployed for 12 months or more.

As part of the Government's "Action Plan for Jobs" initiative, FÁS is administering the Labour Market Education & Training Fund (LMETF), which was launched in December 2012 as MOMENTUM. This fund is a successor to the Labour Market Activation Fund and the aim of the Fund is to provide a range of quality, relevant education & training interventions for up to 6,500 individuals who are long-term unemployed.

Training will be provided within the context of four themes, three of which will support occupational clusters where demand and vacancies exist within certain Labour Market sectors. A fourth theme will focus on the specific needs of people under 25 who are unemployed, assisting them to access and/or return to the Labour Market.

The Department of Social Protection now has responsibility for Labour Market Activation

programmes and policy.

School Accommodation

266. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a decision will issue on an a application for additional funding for renovation works for a primary school (details supplied) in County Carlow. [10119/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): In March 2012 the school referred to by the Deputy was approved devolved funding for the construction of 2 mainstream classrooms under my Department's Additional Accommodation Scheme. The school authorities have applied for additional funding to enable them build 2 mainstream classrooms and a GP Room. A member of the Department's Professional and Technical staff is due to visit the school in the coming days.

A decision on the school's application for additional funding will be made following this visit and the school authorities notified accordingly.

Residential Institutions Issues

267. **Deputy Tom Hayes** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will provide information regarding a fund to be administered by his Department to support survivors of institutional abuse (details supplied). [10122/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The Residential Institutions Statutory Fund Act 2012 was enacted in July 2012 and provides for the establishment of the Residential Institutions Statutory Fund Board. The Board is being established to use the cash contributions of up to €110 million pledged by the religious congregations to support the needs of some 15,000 survivors of residential institutional child abuse. This support will involve the provision of a range of approved services, including health and personal social services, education services and housing services.

Those eligible to apply for assistance from the Fund are those former residents who received awards from the Residential Institutions Redress Board or who received an award or settlement in court proceedings and who would otherwise have received an award from the Redress Board.

Arrangements to establish the Fund are being pursued. I have nominated Sylda Langford to become Chairperson of the Board and in accordance with Government procedures, Ms Langford met with the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Education and Social Protection on February 20th to discuss the approach she will take as Chairperson and her views about the future contribution of the new organisation. I intend to appoint the remaining members to the Board shortly. The process to recruit a Chief Executive Officer (Designate) is underway and I look forward to the early appointment of a suitably qualified individual, whose responsibilities will include driving the various elements of the establishment process.

Student Grant Scheme Applications

268. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny will be awarded a Student Universal Support Ireland grant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10144/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Officials in my Department have confirmed with Student Universal Support Ireland that it is awaiting the final course acceptance form from the student in question to enable her grant application to be processed to finality. This has been requested from the student.

Departmental Agencies Staff Remuneration

269. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will provide details of the payment of bonuses or other performance related payments and or allowances made to the staff of agencies under the aegis of his Department with a yearly breakdown from 2008 outlining the overall amount paid in each year period and the number of staff that received such payments and or allowances. [10163/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Under the Civil Service Scheme of performance related awards for posts at the levels of Assistant Secretary and Deputy Secretary the Chief Executive Officers of both the State Examinations Commission and the National Council for Special Education were eligible for awards. This Scheme was terminated in 2009. Awards made to individual officers under this scheme for 2008 are not disclosed as they are confidential and personal to the officers concerned. Details of the operation of this Scheme are available on the Department of Finance website at www.finance.gov.ie. As the Deputy is aware responsibility for FÁS transferred from the then named Department of Enterprise, Trade and Innovation (D/ETI) to my Department with effect from 1st May 2010. A total of €142,642.75 in bonus payments was paid to top management staff in FÁS in 2008 in respect of work carried out in 2007. This scheme has been suspended indefinitely with no further bonus payments made after 2008.

The payments of increments to civil servants in bodies under the aegis of my Department are linked to performance and there is a minimum standard of performance required to be deemed eligible to progress to the next point of the pay scale appropriate to the grade of the staff member. The latest pay scales for General Service Grades which came into effect on 1 January, 2010, are set out in Circular 28/2009: Revision of pay of Civil Servants available at www.finance.gov.ie/documents/circulars. Because of the number of employees and payroll systems across agencies, providing detailed figures outlining each increment paid in each specific year would involve a disproportionate administrative burden as this information is not collated centrally by this Department.

Departmental Agencies Staff Remuneration

270. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will provide details of payments made to the CEO or equivalent of all agencies under the aegis of his Department including details of any bonuses, pension entitlements or any other remuneration paid to him or her in 2012. [10180/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The information sought by the Deputy is being collated and will be forwarded as soon as possible.

Schools Building Projects Status

271. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will provide an

up to date progress report in relation to the construction of new primary and secondary schools in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10278/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I am pleased to inform the Deputy that there were four major projects in County Kerry announced under my Department's Five Year Capital Investment Programme.

The construction of new school buildings for Presentation School and Nagle Rice NS in Milltown has been devolved for delivery to the National Development Finance Agency (NDFA). The NDFA has recently appointed a Design Team to advance these two projects which are currently scheduled for delivery during 2014/2015.

My Department is also delivering a Major School Building Project at SN Breandan Naofa, Blennerville which is currently at an early stage of Architectural Planning. This project is to progress to construction in 2015/16.

Furthermore, devolved funding for the provision of 8 Mainstream Classrooms in St. Oliver's N.S., Killarney has been approved under the Department's Additional Accommodation Scheme. The project is currently at tender stage.

Schools Building Projects Status

272. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the proposed building project for a school (details supplied) in County Cavan; the present stage of this project; when the project is likely to proceed to the next stage; the likely timescale for construction; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10345/13]

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. A Revised Stage 2(a) Submission is currently with my Department for review. Once this Review is complete, and subject to no further issues arising, the project will progress to Stage 2b 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 this project in the five year construction programme.

Schools which have not been included in the five year construction programme, 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 Status

273. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the proposed building project for a school (details supplied) in County Cavan; the present stage of this project; when the project is likely to proceed to the next stage; the likely timescale for construction; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10346/13]

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 Stage 2a submission is currently with my Department for review. Once the review is complete, subject to no issues arising, the project will progress to Stage 2b 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 this project in the five year construction programme. Schools which have not been included in the five year construction programme, 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 Status

274. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the proposed building project for a school (details supplied) in County Cavan; the present stage of this project; when the project is likely to proceed to the next stage; the likely timescale for construction. [10347/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The Major Building Project for the school referred to by the Deputy is currently at an advanced stage of architectural planning. The Design Team are currently working on Stage 2(b) of the project which includes application for Planning Permission, Fire Certification, Disability Access Certification (DAC) and the preparation of tender documents. Due to competing demands on the 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 last year. Schools which have not been included in the five year construction programme, 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 the Department in future years. The project referred to by the Deputy remains available to be considered for progression in that context.

Courses Accreditation

275. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason the educational course (details supplied) is not a course recognised by his Department and if he appreciates the way this lack of recognition acts as a barrier to accessing educational or social welfare supports; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10351/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Under the Department's student grant scheme, eligible students may receive funding provided they are attending an approved course at an approved institution as defined in the scheme.

I understand that the course referred to by the Deputy does not meet these criteria.

The Deputy will appreciate that, in the current economic climate, I am not in a position to consider any extension of the list of approved institutions.

Eligibility for welfare support is determined and administered by the Department of Social Protection. Any changes to its qualifying criteria are a matter for my colleague the Minister for Social Protection.

Student Grant Scheme Appeals

276. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding a Student Universal Support Ireland appeal in respect of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 9. [10422/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Officials in my Department have confirmed with Student Universal Support Ireland that the student in question appealed the original decision on his grant application to the appeals officer in SUSI and the original decision was overturned.

The grant application was reassessed and a letter issued to the student on 6th February 2013 requesting further documentation. When the requested documentation is returned the student will be notified directly of the outcome.

Departmental Strategies

277. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the way in which his Department oversees and monitors eGovernment development; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9620/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The Department for Public Expenditure and Reform is responsible for developing and coordinating the implementation of eGovernment Policy for the non-commercial public sector.

Since *eGovernment 2012-2015* was launched in April 2012, my Department has been promoting awareness of the content of the Strategy, through bilateral meetings with Public Bodies to agree approaches to progressing and reporting on actions in the Strategy. My Department has also organised a series of events promoting elements of the Strategy, and will arrange further events during 2013.

The strategy contains 44 actions across eight key priority areas. The specific implementation of the actions is the responsibility of each Department and agency.

Action 45 of the Strategy sets out the governance arrangements to ensure that progress with eGovernment plans is appropriately monitored. To facilitate easier reporting by Public Bodies a new website, e.gov.ie, was launched on 23 January 2013. A first progress report under eGovernment 2012-2015 will be prepared by the end of the first quarter of this year. I intend to make this report publicly available.

Flood Prevention Measures

278. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his

plans, if any, to provide a flood relief scheme for an area (details supplied) in County Kilkenny; if the town has been surveyed for such a scheme; if so, the estimated cost of carrying out such major works; the timeframe for planning and completing such a scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9721/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brian Hayes): On foot of an application from Kilkenny County Council under the Minor Flood Works Scheme, the OPW allocated funding of €198,000 in 2010 for flood mitigation works at this location, consisting of channel cleaning and construction of a wall along the River Barrow. A total of €52,185 has been drawn down by the Council to date.

The Council reported in late 2012 that, following an initial investigation, it has been concluded that the design of appropriate mitigation measures would necessitate further examination by an expert hydrogeologist of the relationship between groundwater and river levels during flood events. Further site investigation and monitoring has been undertaken and the Council is awaiting the report of this assessment.

Further funding of €36,000 was allocated to the Council in 2011 for removal of silt from the River Duiske. This work has not been undertaken to date due to the location being within a Special Area of Conservation (SAC).

Telecommunications Services Expenditure

279. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the income the State receives from telecommunications companies in exchange for the siting of telecommunications masts on land space at Garda stations in each year since the arrangement was begun; the terms under which the masts were allowed to be constructed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9819/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brian Hayes): The information sought by the Deputy in relation to the income to the state arising from telecommunication companies is currently being collated and a detailed response will issue within a week.

EU Funding

280. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the way the European Regional Development Fund is operated; the number of companies here that have availed of direct aid to investment in companies in the last five years; the percentage of funding that can be availed of over and above any State funding particularly in the area of manufacturers developing or making more environmentally friendly products; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9894/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): Projects co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund are funded in the first instance by a public grant from a Public Beneficiary Body. The Exchequer may subsequently recoup an element of this public grant from the European Commission, subject to EU eligibility criteria. ERDF funding is not a direct aid to investment, however, nor does it supplement State funding. Full details of Ireland's Structural Funds programme may be found at eustructuralfunds.gov.ie.

For the 2007-2013 ERDF funding period companies developing or manufacturing more

environmentally friendly product may be assisted by the appropriate Public Bodies, i.e. County Enterprise Boards and Sustainable Energy Authority Ireland.

Apprenticeship Programmes

281. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the reasons the Office of Public Works has not engaged with any of the State agencies regarding ensuring places for an apprenticeship programme that would allow the many craftsmen within the OPW to be part of a training programme that would protect the crafts such as french polishing, cabinet making, carpentry upholstery and so on, that are a part of the OPW by the training apprentices in such crafts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10024/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brian Hayes): The Office of Public Works (OPW) has a long and successful history of involvement with the State training agencies in the area of apprenticeships. Over the years the OPW has worked closely with the various bodies such as FÁS (previously ANCO), Teagasc and the colleges of technology in a variety of endeavours, ranging from the provision of training placements for redundant apprentices, to the development of craft curricula for different trades. A programme has operated to engage between 60 and 75 apprentices on a rolling basis over the last 3-4 years, with the final placement due to complete shortly. The OPW is currently reviewing its own apprenticeship requirements and should resources permit, may be in a position to recruit further apprentices later this year.

Flood Relief Schemes Funding

282. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform in view of a reoccurring flooding problem in Sneem, County Kerry which affects a number of properties and actually endangers public safety, if funding will be provided to carry out the work; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10259/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brian Hayes): Following an examination and inspections, the OPW has identified mitigation measures that may provide a solution to the flooding problem in Sneem. The OPW will carry out further analysis of the viability and effectiveness of these measures over the Summer including preliminary quantification of their costs and benefits with a view to discussing with Kerry County Council the appropriate way to proceed. The provision of funding for any agreed mitigation measures will be considered at that point, having regard to the overall availability of funding for flood risk management.

State Properties

283. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will report on the extent, and estimated value, of property held in trust by the State further to Section 28 (2) of the State Property Act 1954, which provides that the State in the person of the Minister assumes responsibility for all personal property and land vested in or held in trust for a dissolved body corporate other than personal property or land held by such body in trust for another person immediately prior to its dissolution and that upon the dissolution of the body corporate, such property becomes State property; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9603/13]

284. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform at the time when function transferred in July 2011 to him under the Ministers and Secretaries (Amendment) Act, 2011 and S.I. No. 418/2011 Finance (Transfer of Departmental Administration and Ministerial Functions) Order 2011, the estimated extent and value of property held by the State under these provisions for upwards of twenty years; and, since the effect of Section 28 is that the Minister does not hold the assets of dissolved companies as beneficial owner, but holds them in trust, if the dissolved company is restored to the Register of Companies within twenty years of the date of its dissolution, and its property is automatically restored to it, the arrangements that apply if the title is not restored to the company / corporate body; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9604/13]

285. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of occasions since June 1977 when the state, further to the State Property Act, Section 31 has waived the interest acquired under Section 28 of the Act; if he will publish a schedule of the beneficiaries of such waivers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9605/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 283 to 285, inclusive, together.

By virtue of section 28 of the State Property Act 1954 all real and personal property held by a company at the time of its dissolution (with the exception of property held in trust by a company for another person) is vested in the State upon the dissolution of a company subject to any incumbrances or charges affecting the property immediately before the dissolution.

Because the only persons with a complete view of the assets held by a company at the time of its dissolution are the directors and officers of the company, the Minister only becomes aware that assets have vested in the State upon notification by an interested party.

Section 31 of the Act confers on the Minister power to waive the interest that has vested in the State. Separately under the provisions of the Companies Acts, once a company is restored to the Register of Companies, it becomes entitled to its property as if it had never lost it. The total value of the personal property held by the Minister arising from the proceeds of bank accounts of dissolved companies, as represented by the balance in the State Property Miscellaneous Deposits Account, is of the order of €2.5m. No overall valuation exercise has been carried out on real estate that has vested in the Minister.

Records are not kept in a format that would facilitate the compilation of the statistics sought by the Deputy (for example, covering the period 1977-2013). In such circumstances, compilation would give rise to a gravely disproportionate expenditure of public service staff time. If the Deputy is interested in a particular case, however, I will endeavour to arrange for relevant details to be provided to her.

Prison Service Overtime

286. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will ensure that workers of the Irish Prison Service, who consistently work unsocial hours, will not lose all payments for this work; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9615/13]

297. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will state his policy that is in place in the event of failure to secure agreement in national discussions with trade unions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4040/13]

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

take Questions Nos. 286 and 297 together

Following intensive engagement in recent days between the public service management and public service staff representatives which was facilitated by the Labour Relations Commission (LRC), the LRC has developed and recommended a set of proposals for consideration and agreement that seeks to secure the savings required by the Exchequer while ameliorating the impacts on public service staff to the greatest extent possible. These proposals include specific cost saving measures in the Prison Service. Public servants will be able to consider the full set of proposals by the LRC which will be available shortly and the public service staff representatives who remained in negotiations have indicated that these proposals will be subject to ballot by members. The Government will await the outcome to this process.

National Monuments

287. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his views on a matter regarding an Office of Public Works site (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9617/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brian Hayes): The opening and closing dates of Skellig Michael for visitors in 2013 will be 17th May to 30th September.

As is normal, the effective operational date for the Monument is required to be approx 2 to 3 weeks in advance of the public opening and the Office of Public Works (OPW) staff will therefore be travelling to the island from approx late April/early May, weather permitting. This is so that the site can be prepared to receive visitors and significant Health and Safety preparations for the season carried out. In particular, the site will be fully assessed after the winter, any hazards cleared from public areas and any necessary repairs carried out.

Departmental Contracts

288. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the total amount spent on outsourced security services in the State Laboratories for 2012; and if he will provide details of the companies providing these services. [9908/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): Due to reasons of commercial sensitivity (given that the contract for provision of facilities management services for laboratories based at the Backweston Campus, Celbridge, Co Kildare, will shortly be going out to tender), it would not be appropriate for me to provide the Deputy with the information sought.

Departmental Contracts

289. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the total amount spent on outsourced cleaning services in State Laboratories for 2012; and if he will provide details of the companies providing these services. [9909/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): Due to reasons of commercial sensitivity (given that the contract for provision of facilities management services for laboratories based at the Backweston Campus, Celbridge, Co Kildare, will shortly

be going out to tender), it would not be appropriate for me to provide the Deputy with the information sought.

Oireachtas Members' Remuneration

290. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the cuts that have taken place to Minister's and TD's salaries and allowances since the beginning of the crisis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10116/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): Significant reductions have been effected to the pay, allowances and expenses of Ministers and TDs through a number of measures since 2009.

The Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Acts of 2009 introduced a progressive pension related deduction, to apply from March 2009, and a reduction in remuneration, effective from January 2010, respectively, for all public servants, including Ministers and TDs. Also in 2009, the Oireachtas (Allowances to Members) and Ministerial and Parliamentary Offices Acts of 2009 abolished the payment of long service increments (LSIs) to members from the formation of the current Oireachtas. As LSIs are no longer payable, current Members of the Dáil and Seanad will not have LSIs included in their pension calculations, regardless of whether or not they had been at one time in receipt of those increments.

Under the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2010, a further reduction in pay was imposed on the remuneration of members of the then Cabinet. This Government itself imposed a policy of strong pay reduction and restraint since taking office in March 2011 with the pay of all members of the Government voluntarily reduced from its first day in Office. Section 6 (c) of the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (Amendment) Act, 2011 provided the legislative basis for these pay reductions from 1 January 2012. The effect of these reductions is that the gross annual salary of An Taoiseach has been reduced by nearly 30% since December 2009, and that of the Tánaiste and Ministers by nearly 25% from December 2009, excluding the impact of the pension related deduction.

In relation to allowances in the nature of pay, following reductions and abolitions by the previous Government to a number of allowances related to Committees, the system of allowances paid to Members was substantially overhauled by this Government in 2011 upon taking office. The rate of allowances paid to Chairpersons of Oireachtas Committees and to Commission Members were reduced further, representing reductions in the region of 50% on the June 2009 rates. The total estimated cost of the current measures in respect of these allowances is now less than €400,000, compared to a cost in 2008 of €1.436 million.

In the context of the Expenditure Estimates for 2013, I announced that a 10% reduction will be applied to the Party Leaders' Allowance rates payable to qualifying leaders of political parties and to qualifying independent members. I also announced that severance payments payable to Ministers and other Officeholders upon cessation of Office are to be abolished. My Department has already commenced preparations on the changes to primary legislation necessary to effect those changes.

Prior to the introduction of the new Parliamentary Standard Allowance expenses regime from 1 March 2010, the previous expenses regime had been reduced by 10%, except for mileage which had been reduced by 25% in the case of mileage.

Since 1 May 2011, Cabinet Ministers with the exception of Taoiseach, Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Law Reform now use their own cars on official business. Ministers of State

have used their own cars on official business since 1984. It was estimated at the time that the saving to be achieved in not supplying State cars to Cabinet Ministers was of the order of €4m per annum.

In December 2012, I announced further cuts to the Oireachtas expense allowance regime as follows:

(i) reduced the rates of the Travel and Accommodation [TAA] element of the allowance by 25% for Dublin (less than 25km) and by 10% for the other bands,

(ii) eliminated the unvouched element of the Public Representational Allowance [PRA], subject to permitting monthly expenditure in the nature of "petty cash" for incidental expenses per month of €100 for each Deputy and €75 for each Senator [and subject to limits in (iii) below], and

(iii) reduced the vouched expenditure limits under the PRA to €20,350 for Deputies, €16,000 for Minister and Minister of Sate, and €12,225 for Senators.

It also reduced the monthly pre-paid envelope allowance for Deputies and Senators by 50%, to 625 for Deputies and 375 for Senators, and to eliminate the unvouched options of the secretarial support allowances.

All of these changes have resulted in, and will generate future, significant financial savings to the Exchequer. It is my intention to continue to ensure that the greatest value for money can be achieved in relation to payments made to members of the Houses of the Oireachtas on an ongoing basis.

Departmental Agencies Staff Remuneration

291. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will provide details of the payment of bonuses or other performance related payments and or allowances made to the staff of agencies under the aegis of his Department with a yearly breakdown from 2008 outlining the overall amount paid in each year period and the number of staff that received such payments and or allowances. [10170/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): In response to the Deputy's query the following is a list of payment of bonuses or other performance related payments and or allowances that were made to the staff of agencies under the aegis of my Department:

Year	Bonuses (scheme of performance related awards for posts at Assistant Secretary level)	Performance Related Payments (Merit Awards)	Allowances (Private Secretary, Higher Duty, Key holding)
2008	€17,800 (for 2007)	€11,575 (16 staff)	€32,661.17 (12 staff)
2009	Nil	€10,000 (19 staff)	€42,617.11 (12 staff)
2010	Nil	€11,100 (19 staff)	€29,565.43 (4 staff)
2011	Nil	€ 6,400 (11 staff)	€19,411.00 (3 staff)
2012	Nil	€ 6,600 (12 staff)	€19,746.78 (3 staff)

Public Appointments Service

Year	Bonuses (scheme of performance related awards for posts at Assistant Secretary level)	Performance Related Payments (Merit Awards)	Allowances (Private Secretary, Higher Duty, Key holding)
2008	€16,000	€19,155 (73 staff)	€50,610.75 (29 staff)
2009	Nil	€7,376.00 (42 staff)	€37,356.47 (15 staff)
2010	Nil	€250 (2 staff)	€40,637.90 (15 staff)
2011	Nil	Nil	€40,343.20 (21 staff)
2012	Nil	Nil	€43,606.48 (21 staff)

Special EU Programmes Body

Year	Bonuses	Number of Staff
2008*	€5,600	9
2009	€1,050	5
2010	€462.50	4
2011	€975.00	6
2012	Nil	Nil

* Please note that this included a contractual performance related bonus of £8,000 was paid to the SEUPB's Chief Executive in May 2008 for the 2007 performance year. There have been no bonuses awarded to the Chief Executive since this date. All other bonuses were paid under a Northern Irish Civil Service Bonus scheme to staff based in Belfast and Omagh who work under the terms and conditions of employment of the Northern Ireland Civil Service.

Departmental Agencies Staff Remuneration

292. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will provide details of payments made to the CEO or equivalent of all agencies under the aegis of his Department including details of any bonuses, pension entitlements or any other remuneration paid to him or her in 2012. [10187/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): In response to the Deputy's question the following table outlines the details of payments made to the CEO or equivalent of all agencies under the aegis of my Department in 2012:

Agency	Title	Salary	Employer Pension Contribution
Institute of Public Administration	Director General	€188,952.00	€65,377.00
Office of the Ombudsman	Director General	€146,649.71	-
State Laboratory	State Chemist	€108,491.00	-
Public Appointments Service(Started 20/03/2012)	CEO	€96,566.09	-

Pension Provisions

293. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when a determination will be made regarding a pension issue in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10221/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): I am aware that you wrote to me last year on behalf of the person in question.

While I understand that it had been anticipated that the issue would have been finalised by now, I am informed by my officials that the case in fact gave rise to complex legal and policy issues and had implications beyond a single individual.

Officials within my Department are currently however finalizing a report for submission for my consideration no later than the end of next week.

Public Procurement Contracts Tenders

294. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the steps his Department intends to take to ensure that Government procurement impacts directly on both youth and long term unemployment. [3248/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The scope for including social considerations in public contracts is something that I have been examining closely recently. In this regard, I would refer the Deputy to my reply on this issue (PQ 3066/13 - answered 23/01/13).

The inclusion of a social clause in all public procurement contracts requiring that a quota of young unemployed people or long-term unemployed be employed in the delivery of the contract poses a number of risks. Firstly, it is against EU Treaty principles to discriminate between people on the basis of age. Secondly, in the current economic climate, and in particular bearing in mind the difficulties in the construction sector, businesses have for obvious reasons been reducing their existing workforce rather than taking on new employees. Consequently, it would be expected that, where a business is awarded a public contract, the work would be carried out by the existing employees of that business. In such circumstances a social clause requiring that a number of long-term unemployed be employed in delivering a public contract could either impose an additional cost on SMEs that they may not be able to afford, or result in an employee of the supplier being let go in favour of a long-term unemployed person.

The Government has a wide range of measures that it is deploying to facilitate job creation and support labour activation, with particular emphasis on assisting long term unemployed people. Obviously, the main purpose of the public procurement process is to ensure that goods, services and works are purchased by the State in a manner that is legal, transparent and of high probity, and our key requirement is the achievement of value for money. Within this context, my Department and the National Procurement Service are examining the use of social clauses as an additional means of supporting activation and we are seeking to identify the scope for the use of social clauses in parts of the capital area in particular.

Ministerial Meetings

295. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he has met the social partners since this round of talks has commenced on the Croke Park agreement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3971/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): I met representatives of the Public Services Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions in December last regarding the commencement of discussions with public service management on a new agenda for reductions in the cost of delivering public services and substantial longer term productivity improvements and workplace reforms.

Furthermore, I attended a plenary meeting of the parties yesterday at which the Labour Relations Commission presented proposals after intensive discussions over the weekend. I understand that the proposals are being finalized by the parties and once that is concluded I will brief the House on them.

Outside of this current process, I also hold periodic meetings with trade union leaders and officials of my Department meet with stakeholders including representatives of public service trade unions on a regular basis.

Outsourcing of Public Services

296. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of non-core public service activities that have been selected for priority outsourcing to companies based here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9083/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): Evaluating opportunities for the external delivery of some non-core public services is an action in the Public Service Reform Plan agreed by Government in November 2011. In July 2012, the Government agreed a range of actions aimed at achieving a focused and integrated approach to external service delivery of non-core processes with the objective of reducing costs and focusing staff resources on priority areas.

As part of this approach, the Government has decided that all proposed new services across the Public Service will be tested for external service delivery before any approval to provide the service internally will be granted. External service delivery leads have been appointed in every Department and Sector and the three major sectors of Health, Justice and Local Government have prepared external service delivery plans. My Department is also examining a number of potential cross-Departmental major projects for external service delivery.

While my Department is overseeing the development and implementation of external service delivery policy for the Public Service, the testing and ultimate decision with regard to the outsourcing of any particular service is a matter for the individual public bodies concerned in each case. All contracts offered for external service delivery will be subject to the normal rules governing public procurement, which require all services to be offered by open competitive tender.

Question No. 297 answered with Question No. 286.

Proposed Legislation

298. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the date on which he plans to publish the Houses of the Oireachtas (Inquiries, Privileges and Procedures) Bill, in order to facilitate a banking inquiry into the activities of banking institutions in respect of 2001 to 2012; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10302/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): As the Deputy

will be aware, I strongly support the objective of undertaking an effective and legally robust parliamentary banking inquiry. I wish to advise the Deputy that the Houses of the Oireachtas (Inquiries Privileges and Procedures) Bill 2012 is currently at an advanced stage in the drafting process and is expected to be published in the spring session.

As set out in the General Scheme of the Bill, published following its approval by Government on 31 October 2012, responsibility is assigned exclusively to the Houses of the Oireachtas to determine the requirement for a formal inquiry, the terms of reference of that inquiry and the procedural and organisational aspects of the inquiry.

Public Sector Reform Implementation

299. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if, in relation to public sector reform, he will clarify the assessments and cost-benefit analyses that have been undertaken into the non-payroll area of expenditure to identify efficiencies such as enhancing IT capabilities, reducing rental payments where possible, developing shared services and so on; the savings which have been achieved to date on the non-payroll side of expenditure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10192/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The need for careful evaluation and appraisal of all significant areas of expenditure, including those contained in the Government's Public Service Reform Plan, is essential, especially in the context of on-going resource constraints.

The Government's approach to addressing the management of expenditure over the medium-term has been clearly set out in the Comprehensive Expenditure Report (CER) 2012-2014. Under the CER, multi-annual current expenditure ceilings are fixed for each Department in order to make clear, in advance, the resources available for each area and the level of savings required. The intention of this reform measure is to improve the focus on medium-term, structural and strategic planning of expenditure within each area and to prevent spending overruns where possible.

Good progress has been made to advance reforms in the area of evidence-based expenditure policy. This includes actions taken in relation to the Public Spending Code to consolidate existing procedures in this area and modernise them in line with best national and international practice. These reforms are supported by the establishment of a Public Service Evaluation Network, reforms to the Value for Money (VFM) and Policy Review process and the introduction of new Focused Policy Assessments designed to answer specific issues of policy configuration and delivery.

With regard to the specific areas referred to in the Deputy's question, Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) are key enablers to delivering improved public services. In 2012, my Department published the eGovernment Strategy 2012-2015 and the Cloud Commuting Strategy, which identified necessary actions to enhance the delivery of public services using ICT. While these strategies were developed by my Department in conjunction with the Public Service Chief Information Officer (CIO) Council, the specific responsibility for implementation of actions arising from these strategies and for assessing the efficiencies that arise, including enhancing ICT capability, is a matter for each individual Department and Office.

The Reform Plan has given an added impetus to the OPW's on-going drive to reduce rental outgoings. Through a programme of lease surrenders and rent reviews, The OPW has reduced the annual rental cost of Civil Service accommodation by approximately €25 million. The Re-

form Plan has been given further support by a specific Government decision mandating the OPW to further rationalise Civil Service accommodation and produce more space efficient accommodation standards. This will facilitate the surrender of the maximum feasible number of leases as lease breaks arise thus further reducing the Government's rental costs. As part of this process, the OPW has been asked to work with the various sectors within the Public Service, e.g., Local Authorities, HSE, etc., to develop standards and protocols that will facilitate the sharing of buildings and the transfer of property, thus reducing the State's overall property costs.

A decision-making model for Shared Services has been established to evaluate value for money to the taxpayer for all Shared Services programmes under my Department's remit. A cost-benefit analysis to assess the potential efficiencies that a Shared Services Centre can deliver, of both pay and non-payroll expenditure, is carried out in respect of each proposed Shared Service programme. This analysis is assessed with comparable benchmarks elsewhere to identify the opportunity for improving cost efficiencies and effectiveness for a specific function. These make up a significant part of the overall business case. The business case also considers a number of possible options and assesses the financial and non-financial value of each of those options. Each Shared Service programme has a business case submitted for peer review to the Shared Service Transformation Unit and the Central Economic Evaluation Unit (for evaluation of the financial and non-financial assumptions against the Public Spending Code).

The methodology I have described above allows me to report that the Human Resources and Pensions Shared Services Centre for the Civil Service, PeoplePoint, is expected to yield combined pay and non-pay savings in the region of an annual net saving of €12.5 million by 2014 while the number of staff involved in delivering these services will reduce by a minimum of 17%. The first transitions to PeoplePoint are expected at the end of March 2013, with all 40 in scope bodies to be transitioned by the end of 2014. A similar approach has been taken to develop a business case for Payroll Shared Services and to assess the baseline performance of Banking and Financial Management for consideration for Shared Services. A cost-benefit analysis for Shared Services projects notified to my Department is also being undertaken across the Public Service sectors of Health and Local Government.

I would also point out that the Progress Reports published by the Implementation Body overseeing progress on the Public Service Agreement have identified significant non-pay administrative efficiency savings. Two reports have been issued to date – the first in June 2011 and the second in June 2012.

Overall, good progress has been made on delivering savings and implementing the Public Service Reform Plan. Of course, it remains a matter for each Minister and their Departments to ensure that the Vote-level allocations are adhered to and at the same time ensure that they continue to provide essential front-line services and respond to increasing demands.

Flood Relief Schemes Funding

300. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when he will provide funding or to have work undertaken to deal with flooding problems caused by the River Reane in the Fenagh area near Ballinamore, County Leitrim; if his attention has been drawn to the concerns of the local community in relation to the damage caused by recent flooding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10327/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brian Hayes): The Office of Public Works recently approved funding of €10,000 under the Minor

Flood Mitigation Works & Coastal Protection Scheme to Leitrim County Council to carry out a feasibility study to assess the flooding problem at River Reane at Tully Lough in the Fenagh area. The progression of the study is matter for Leitrim County Council.

EU Programmes

301. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the likely timeframe for the introduction of a successor programme to the peace III programme; when he proposes to announce the level of funding to be provided by both the Irish and British Governments following the European Council decision to continue funding for the peace programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10328/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): At the meeting of the European Council in Brussels on 7/8 February 2013, EU Heads of State and Government agreed to the inclusion of a special allocation of €150 million for a new PEACE Programme in the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) for 2014-2020. This special allocation, which was not provided for in the European Commission's original MFF proposal, was included following the intervention of the Irish Government. The MFF is subject to the agreement of the European Parliament.

I very much welcome the European Council decision to make funding available for a new PEACE Programme. The PEACE Programmes have made a significant contribution to supporting reconciliation, to the creation of a shared society, and to addressing the legacy of the troubles. Significant challenges remain, however, and addressing them is important for the longer term viability of the peace process.

The final size of the next PEACE programme, which will also include funding from Ireland and the UK, will be determined following the programme planning process. The planning process for a possible successor Programme for PEACE III was initiated in April 2012, with my Department and the Department of Finance and Personnel asking the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) to commence preparation of detailed programme proposals in close consultation with the relevant Government Departments.

The development of the new programme proposals is being overseen by a Programme Development Steering Group chaired by SEUPB and consisting of representatives of Government Departments, local Government, and the trade union, business, rural and community and voluntary sectors. A public consultation process on potential priorities and content of the Programme ran from 28 August to 20 November 2012. Following consideration of the consultation responses, a draft Operational Programme for PEACE IV will be prepared and a further public consultation on the draft Programme will be held in early to mid 2013.

It is intended that both Operational Programmes for PEACE IV and INTERREG V will be presented to the Northern Ireland Executive, the Irish Government and the Scottish Government during 2013. Formal submission to the European Commission for approval will take place following agreement of the three Governments.

EU Funding

302. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if any Government Departments are planning to be involved in 2013 EU funding under the competitiveness and innovation programme and seventh framework programme; the calls for pre-

commercial procurement grants open at present; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9619/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Sean Sherlock): Ireland's researchers and companies have been involved in more than 1,500 successful applications obtaining European Commission funding of approximately €485 million (2007-2012) under the Seventh Framework Programme (FP7). The overall Irish success rate at 22.7%, is above the European Member State average of 22.1%, and a very positive indication of the prospects for Irish participation over the lifetime of FP7 and broadly in line with our national targets. Ireland's involvement in the 2013 work programme is expected to reflect participation to date, i.e. demonstrating an application success rate above the EU average.

In July 2012, the European Commission launched its final and largest ever package of FP7 calls, an €8.1 billion work programme for 2013. This work programme is currently underway, with closing dates for proposals spanning September 2012 to year end 2013. Funding will be awarded in 2013 – 2014.

The limited budget attached to the Competitiveness and Innovation Programme (CIP) means that it is not an expenditure-orientated programme like FP7 or the Cohesion Policy Funds, but one that seeks to achieve its ambitions and broadly defined objects by leveraging its ideas, products and partnerships into other policies and programmes. Enterprise Ireland will be engaging with CIP funding for 2013 through the Enterprise Europe Network (EEN) which is the primary instrument for the CIP programme. As suitable calls arise, the EEN will be engaging with its client base. One very concrete benefit to Ireland and SMEs from this programme is its joint funding of the Enterprise Europe Network, which is in the region of €450,000 per year.

In relation to Pre-Commercial Procurement, there is Irish involvement in two pilot programmes in the CIP ICT Policy Support Programme. These pilot programmes mainly address interoperability of public service pilots on a large scale across Europe, with the ultimate objective of wide-scale service uptake eventually by all 27 member states. Under this year's 2013 call for this work programme, PPI (Public Procurement of Innovative solutions) instruments will be used for the first time, in anticipation of their wide-scale use in Horizon 2020 to fund innovation procurement.

While there has been no Irish participation to date in FP7 ICT PCP projects, there are some PCP topics within the current ICT call and there is evidence of some interest by Irish academia in exploring the feasibility of involvement with a PCP in the technology-enhanced learning area.

Job Creation Issues

303. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if the Cabinet committee on job creation has investigated the jobs crisis in County Kerry; if it will request the Industrial Development Agency to prioritise County Kerry for jobs investment in view of the fact that the county lost Objective 1 Status in 1998 and the fact that the three nearest counties have fared exceptionally better with IDA site visits, County Cork 31, County Limerick 13 and County Clare six; if he and the Cabinet Committee on Job Creation will request the IDA to give the county the jobs boost it so urgently requires; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10253/13]

315. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of jobs announced by the Industrial Development Agency and Enterprise Ireland for County

Kerry in each of the following years, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10277/13]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 303 and 315 together.

I have been informed by IDA Ireland that, in the five year period 2008 to 2012, there were three IDA job announcements for County Kerry with the potential to create 155 jobs. During the same period, there were two Enterprise Ireland investment announcements with the potential to create 41 jobs and nine High Potential Start Up (HPSU) projects announced for county Kerry. For reasons of commercial sensitivity, it is not possible to give details of the job potential of these HPSU projects.

At the end of 2012 there were 12 IDA Ireland supported companies in Kerry employing 1,600 people, while Enterprise Ireland had 132 client companies in the county employing 3,318 people.

In relation to the attraction of foreign direct investment (FDI) to County Kerry, IDA Ireland has indicated that the challenge it faces is to continue to win top quality investment for Ireland in a very challenging global environment. International competition for FDI has become extremely intense and continues to increase. Leading global corporations require a significant population pool, access to qualified talent, world class physical and digital infrastructure as well as the availability of sophisticated professional and business support services. IDA Ireland, however, tries to influence these choices by prioritising the marketing of Gateway locations within each Region as the locations of critical mass with sufficient scale of population, skills, infrastructure, companies, business services, etc. and highlights the opportunities provided by Hub locations which are within commuting distances of these Gateways. With continuing enhancement and improvements in physical and digital infrastructure, an FDI project secured for one Gateway can have a positive impact on other Gateways and their surrounding areas. It must be acknowledged, however, that the decision on where a client company will locate a new FDI investment is ultimately made by the senior managers of the companies involved.

I am mindful of the concerns that have been expressed by Deputies on all sides of the House about the relatively low level of site visits to certain regional locations and have raised this matter with the CEO of IDA Ireland with a view to exploring what further initiatives can be taken to influence potential investors to invest in such locations.

I am mindful, also, that in order to ensure that Ireland can continue to compete globally for foreign direct investment, it will be necessary to undertake an in depth analysis of our FDI strategy with a view to informing the formulation of an appropriate strategy for the period post 2014, when IDA Ireland's current strategy is implemented. This analysis, which will be undertaken later this year, will take account of factors such as key trends emerging in FDI best practice internationally, Ireland's strengths in attracting FDI, any changes to the EU's State Aid rules that may be introduced in the near future and our agreed approach to regional development.

Notwithstanding these challenges, IDA Ireland has assured me that it will in 2013, in accordance with the Government's 2013 Action Plan for Jobs, seek to target more than 130 new investments, secure €500 million of R&D expenditure and create 13,000 new jobs in its client companies.

Consumer Protection

304. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if his attention has been drawn to the charges that can be applied to flights when booked by credit card; and if he will legislate to ban such practices. [9635/13]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department's consultation paper of September 2012 on Article 19 (Fees for the use of means of payment) and Article 22 (Additional payments) of Directive 2011/83/EU on Consumer Right gives details of payment charges applied by a number of traders, including the charges applied by airlines referred to by the Deputy.

Article 52(3) of Directive 2007/64/EC on Payment Services in the Internal Market states that a 'payment service provider shall not prevent the payee from requesting a charge or from offering a reduction for the use of a given payment instrument.' Article 52(3) gave Member States discretion to 'forbid or limit the right to request charges taking into account the need to encourage competition and forbid the use of efficient payment instruments'. Ireland, in common with 12 other Member States including Germany and the United Kingdom, chose not to give effect to this option. Accordingly, it is not unlawful per se for traders in Ireland to impose charges on consumers for the use of a particular method of payment.

Article 19 of Directive 2011/83/EU provides that Member States 'shall prohibit traders from charging consumers in respect of the use of a given means of payment, fees that exceed the cost borne by the trader for the use of such means.' Though this Article does not prohibit payment charges as such, it aims to ensure that such charges reflect the real cost of payment instruments to the trader and are not used as a source of additional revenue.

Shortly after the adoption of the Directive, I stated my intention to give early effect to the provisions of Article 19 and Article 22. To this end, my Department issued the consultation paper on the implementation of the two Articles referred to above. One of the issues raised by the consultation has required my Department to seek legal advice from the Attorney General's Office and the European Commission. My Department has recently received the opinion of the European Commission and expects to receive the advice of the Attorney General's Office in the near future. On receipt of this advice, I will assess, and decide upon, the options relating to the transposition and application of Articles 19 and 22.

Employment Appeals Tribunal

305. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation his views on correspondence (details supplied) regarding sick leave. [9696/13]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Employment Appeals Tribunal (EAT) is independent in the exercise of its quasi-judicial function and I have no direct involvement in its day to day operations. It is long established practice that Ministers do not get involved with its adjudication function. The matter referred to here is in fact an ongoing partially heard case before the EAT. I understand that the claim was received by the Tribunal on 27th March 2011, under the Unfair Dismissals Acts 1977 to 2007 and the Redundancy Payments Acts, 1967 to 2007. A hearing of these claims took place on 13th February, 2013, during which evidence was heard from the claimant. The case was adjourned and is scheduled to be resumed at a later date.

As this matter remains before the EAT as a case which is awaiting final adjudication, it would therefore not be appropriate for me to comment on the specific circumstances of this case.

Credit Guarantee Scheme Implementation

306. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation further to the announcement of the loan guarantee scheme for small and medium enterprises in budget 2012 announcements of December 2011, the total amount that has been to date extended to SMEs under the scheme and the number of SMEs to which that total relates. [9759/13]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Credit Guarantee Scheme is operational since 24th October 2012. There are currently 14 approved guaranteed loans resulting in €1.5m of additional lending being provided to viable companies as of close of business on 15th February 2013. As a result of the sanctioned lending it is expected that there will be 113 new jobs created and 19 jobs will be maintained.

The scheme has been designed to address market failure affecting certain SMEs on the margins of commercial lending decisions, who, because of a lack of collateral or because of the sector they operate in, face difficulties in accessing traditional bank credit. The Department and the Operator are in regular contact with the participating banks to improve take-up of the scheme, however, the Deputy will be aware that the Scheme is demand- led. Potential borrowers are being advised to contact the participating banks directly. The Department will of course keep a close eye on developments in respect of the scheme as matters unfold.

Credit Guarantee Scheme Implementation

307. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation further to the announcement of the loan guarantee scheme for small and medium enterprises in the Budget 2012 announcements in December 2011, the total amount of fees paid and payable to a company (details supplied) for administering the scheme to date. [9760/13]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): Following a competitive tendering process, Capita Asset Services (Ireland) Limited was selected to operate the Credit Guarantee Scheme under the Credit Guarantee Act 2012.

The agreed charges under the terms of the contract are €199,000 plus VAT based on 1,875 loans per year for each of years 1 to 3. There is provision in the contract for revision of costs in years 2 and 3 depending on the uptake of the Scheme. The cost of the Scheme will be partially offset by receipts from the 2% premium paid by borrowers.

The Scheme went live on the 24th October 2012, and so far a total of €299,981.30 including VAT has been paid to the operator. This payment includes additional charges in respect of initial set up and implementation costs and charges in respect of training and lender accreditation costs and for the day to day running of the first quarter of the Scheme, for three lenders.

Microenterprise Loan Fund Application Numbers

308. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation further to the announcement of the €90m microfinance scheme on 27 September 2012, the total amount that has been to date extended to businesses under the scheme and the number of businesses to which that total relates. [9761/13]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): Microfinance Ireland (MFI) began operating in October 2012. It is my intention that progress reports on the

Microenterprise Loan Fund will be published via the MFI website microfinanceireland.ie and on my Department's website enterprise.gov.ie on a quarterly basis.

106 loan applications were received by MFI up to today, with 31 loans approved to companies across a range of sectors. The value of these approved loans is €508,000 in total, and this will support approximately 80 jobs. There are 37 applications in progress. 38 were withdrawn, declined or are under appeal. MFI is currently actively promoting the availability of its loan fund and is focusing on a media campaign to raise awareness of the Scheme across the country. Other options for promoting the Fund are also being examined.

Microenterprise Loan Fund Expenditure

309. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation further to the announcement of the €90m microfinance scheme on 27 September 2012, the total cost of operating Microfinance Ireland in 2012 and provide the forecast cost of operating Microfinance Ireland in 2013 and the current effective full time headcount of that organisation. [9762/13]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): Microfinance Ireland opened for business on 1st October 2012. The full accounts for 2012 will amount to €461,000, which will include the cost of setting up the Microenterprise Loan Fund Scheme which was approximately €278,000. The set-up costs included company incorporation, legal support, advertising and communications, launch and financial advice. In the quarter to end December 2012 operating costs were €183,000 and included staffing, marketing, credit and other costs.

The accounts of Microfinance Ireland to end December 2012 are currently being prepared and have not yet been approved by its Board of Directors. The cost of operating Microfinance Ireland in 2013 is forecast to be €1.5m of which €800,000 is the forecast cost of bad debts. Six staff are currently employed in Microfinance Ireland.

Enterprise Support Schemes

310. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if there is any funding or supports for persons with a disability who would like to start a business in the Dublin area. [9857/13]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The County and City Enterprise Boards (CEBs) support the indigenous micro-enterprise sector in the start-up and expansion phases and stimulate enterprise potential at local level. The CEBs are the first port of call in terms of advice, direction, training and grant support for anyone who wishes to start a business. The CEBs will deal with queries from all potential clients (including those with a disability). Contact details for the CEBs are available on www.enterpriseboards.ie.

The CEBs offer a range supports including both financial assistance and non-financial assistance. The forms of financial assistance, which are available subject to certain criteria and conditions, are Priming Grants, Business Expansion Grants and Feasibility/Innovation Grants. The provision of non-financial assistance can take the form of a wide range of business advice and information services, management capability training and development programmes, e-Commerce training initiatives etc. Training courses include such topics as start-your-own-business, taxation for beginners, internet marketing, idea's generation and negotiation skills.

In addition, Microfinance Ireland is providing support in the form of loans of up to €25,000 available to start-up, newly established or growing microenterprises employing less than 10 people with viable business propositions that do not meet the conventional risk criteria applied by the banks. The Fund has a significant entrepreneurship focus and is open to anyone with a viable business proposal. Applications for the new Microfinance Fund should be channelled through the local CEB.

A Guide, entitled "Financial Support for Irish Business" has been published on my Department's website at www.djei.ie under "latest publications" and includes information on supports, other than those available from the Enterprise Development Agencies such as "Revenue Job Assist" and "Back to Work Enterprise Allowance".

Departmental Consultations

311. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the position regarding the stated reform review; if a submission (details supplied) will be included in the process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9931/13]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): I launched a public consultation process last November to seek as broad a range of views as possible on how the reform of the national micro and small business support infrastructure could best be implemented. The closing date for receipt of submissions was originally 19th December 2012 but this was extended to 18th January 2013, because of the level of interest. A total of 88 submissions were received and these responses will inform and influence the final shape of the LEOs and the services that the LEOs will provide. Many of the submissions make positive suggestions on how the reform could be rolled out effectively across a range of issues. These responses are currently being examined, including the positive response from the Crafts Council of Ireland, and will be factored into shaping the operational scope of the LEOs.

All submissions received will be published on my Department's website on completion of the review and distillation of the huge response.

The Crafts sector plays an important role in sustainable job creation across the country. Taken nationally the crafts industry is a significant employer and it is estimated that the sector employs over 5,770 people. Both Minister Perry and I view the reform as an important opportunity to get a combined effort in behind start-ups and small business and we shall vigorously work to harness the potential of the new model.

Departmental Agencies Staff Remuneration

312. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if he will provide details of the payment of bonuses or other performance related payments and or allowances made to the staff of agencies under the aegis of his Department with a yearly breakdown from 2008 outlining the overall amount paid in each year period and the number of staff that received such payments and or allowances. [10168/13]

313. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if he will provide details of payments made to the CEO or equivalent of all agencies under the aegis of his Department including details of any bonuses, pension entitlements or any other remuneration paid to him or her in 2012. [10185/13]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 312 and 313 together.

Payment of remuneration, including bonuses, pension entitlements, allowances etc. for both the CEOs and staff of the agencies under the remit of my Department is a day to day matter for the individual agencies and I have no function in the matter.

The CEOs of a number of agencies under the aegis of my Department are eligible to participate in a Performance Related Award Scheme approved by the Minister for Jobs Enterprise, and Innovation, with the consent of the Minister for Finance. The Schemes, which are based on the Department of Finance's Guidelines on Performance Related Awards in non-commercial state bodies, provide for a maximum award of 20% of total remuneration. Approval for such awards is a matter for the Board of the relevant body. These Performance Related Awards have been suspended since April 2009.

I have asked the Agencies to respond directly to Deputy Pringle on the matter.

Unemployment Levels

314. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the rate of unemployment in Limerick city for the years 2009, 2010, 2011 and the current rate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10199/13]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): I am advised by CSO that unemployment rate data at this particular level of detail are not available. However, based on census results in 2011, an unemployment rate of 28.6% is recorded for Limerick City at administrative county level.

The Live Register series gives a monthly breakdown of the number of people claiming Jobseekers Benefit, Jobseekers Allowance and other registrants as registered with the Department of Social Protection. Figures are published for each county and local social welfare office. It should be noted that the Live Register is not a definitive measure of unemployment as it includes part-time workers, and seasonal and casual workers entitled to Jobseekers Benefit or Allowance. Matters in relation to the Live Register generally fall within the remit of my colleague, the Minister for Social Protection.

Question No. 315 answered with Question No. 303.

IDA Staff

316. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if it is acceptable that the Industrial Development Agency have no official designated to cover the north east area; if this is the only region in the country with no designated IDA official; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10344/13]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The allocation of duties to individual staff members in IDA Ireland is a day to day operational matter for the agency and not one in which I have a function. I have made enquiries of IDA Ireland and I have been informed that, during 2010, a Business Process Transformation Initiative was conducted by the Agency. This initiative examined every role in the organisation for the purpose of highlighting operational changes that could be implemented to enhance delivery of key objectives; identifying areas of duplication that could be addressed by improved processes; as well as iden-

tifying areas where there was scope to introduce enhanced IT systems, thus giving the agency greater flexibility to relocate staff to client facing functions.

Following that process, I understand that IDA Ireland retains two offices in the North East Region – an office in Cavan, with one full time role concentrating on client facing activities and an office in Dundalk, with one client facing role and one part time support role. In 2011 and 2012 there has been a net gain of 378 jobs in IDA companies in the North East, compared to a net loss of 733 in the period 2008 - 2010.

At the end of 2012 there were 34 IDA Ireland supported companies employing 3,211 people in IDA's North East Region, which consists of the counties of Cavan, Monaghan and Louth. In addition, there have been some very significant investments announced for the region in the last 12 months. In February 2012 Pay Pal announced the creation of 1,000 jobs in Dundalk over a four year period. This was followed in October with the announcement by Yapstone of the creation of 120 new jobs at its new EMEA HQ in Drogheda, while earlier this month, EBay announced its intention to create 450 jobs in its operating centre in Dundalk. These investments, along with the existing base of overseas companies located in the Region, will contribute to the economic development of the Region as a whole.

Rent Supplement Scheme Applications

317. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if rent supplement is payable in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9534/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The person concerned has made an application for rent supplement on the 30th November 2012 and has been requested to provide further information in order to process her claim. A decision will be made on her application when the information has been provided.

Question No. 318 withdrawn.

Respite Care Grant Payments

319. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Social Protection her views on correspondence (details supplied) regarding the respite care grant; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9564/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I am aware that the Government's decision to reduce the respite care grant has been difficult for carers to accept. I am not in a position to reverse this decision. While the Comprehensive Expenditure Review, 2012 to 2014, published in December 2011, provided for a reduction of a further €540 million in expenditure by my Department in 2013, the Government was able to reduce the net savings required for this year to €390 million. This was €150 million less than originally indicated. This enabled the Government to ensure, for the second year in a row, that there was no reduction in primary weekly rates of payment.

In 2013, the Department will spend almost €20.3 billion on the wide range of schemes and services it operates. Carers receive significant income supports from the Department, among the highest rates of income support in Europe. Carers receive additional support in the form of free travel and household benefits (for those who live with the person for whom they care),

and the annual respite care grant in respect of each person for whom they care. Such an annual payment, in a single lump sum with no requirement to satisfy a means test, is not available for any other group nor is there an equivalent payment for carers in any other country in Europe. If a person is getting certain qualifying social welfare payments and also providing full time care and attention to another person, they can keep their main social welfare payment and get the half-rate carer's allowance as well. They can also receive an extra half-rate carer's allowance if they care for more than one person.

The current rate of the respite care grant (€1,375) remains significantly higher, and still more than double what it was in 2002 (€635). Expenditure on the grant has increased by 290% since 2005 from €34.3 million to €135 million in 2012.

In relation to the next budget, the Deputy will be aware that the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform's Expenditure Report 2013 published by Government last December provides for additional new expenditure reduction measures of €440 million to be achieved in 2014 in the Department of Social Protection budget. Reducing overall expenditure in 2014 in line with this target will be very challenging. No decisions have been made at this stage as to how these targets will be met. The Government will consider this having regard to all of its commitments.

State Pension (Contributory) Eligibility

320. **Deputy Eoghan Murphy** asked the Minister for Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 370 of 18 December 2012, if she will review the case of a person (details supplied) regarding public sector pensions. [9588/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): State pension transition (SPT) is currently payable, for a maximum of 12 months, to people who retire from work after reaching age 65, and who satisfy the eligibility conditions of that scheme.

The Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2011 provided for changes to State pension age, commencing with the abolition of SPT from 1st January 2014, which will standardise the age for payment of a State pension to 66 years. The State pension age will be further increased to 67 years in 2021 and to 68 years in 2028.

From 2014, a person aged 65 and unable to remain in, or find, employment would be entitled to apply for a social welfare payment based on the normal criteria. The Department is currently working with the relevant agencies of State who have a role to play in identifying and breaking down barriers to remaining in work past the age of 65.

Community Employment Schemes Eligibility

321. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Social Protection the position regarding an appeal on an extension to a participation on a community scheme in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Clare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9714/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Community Employment has two options, each with its own set of qualifying conditions: Part-Time Integration Option (PTI) - This is a 12-month work programme with training and development opportunities. This option offers eligible participants part-time work and training for one year; Part-Time Job Option (PTJ) - This option is for persons who are unemployed for over 3 years and who require more

long-term support. Participants may have their annual contract renewed for up to 3 years duration for those under 55 years of age, and up to a lifetime maximum of 6 years for those between 55 and 65 inclusive, subject to approval by my Department.

The person concerned is under 55 years of age and is employed under the PTJ option. He will have completed 156 weeks (three years) as a PTJ participant on 15th March 2013. There is no provision to grant additional time under the PTJ option.

Supplementary Welfare Allowance Payments

322. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason a reduced rate of supplementary welfare allowance recently issued to a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9715/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The person concerned has been in receipt of a weekly supplementary welfare allowance payment at the full personal of €186.00 since the 6th November 2012. Supplementary welfare allowance is not payable for the period he spent in hospital. However, a hospital comforts payment has been awarded and payment issued along with his supplementary welfare allowance payment due on 21st February 2013. The person concerned was also issued with an application form for a hospital clothing allowance which he should complete and return to the community welfare service office.

Deserted Wife's Benefit Eligibility

323. **Deputy Simon Harris** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason persons who were in receipt of the now defunct deserted wives allowance prior to its discontinuation in 1997 continue to receive this payment until they reach transition pension age; her plans to review this practice; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9716/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The deserted wife's allowance (DWA) is a means-tested payment paid to a woman under the age of 66 years who has no dependent children and who was deserted by her husband, and who does not qualify for the social insurance contribution-based deserted wife's benefit (DWB). The scheme was closed to new applications with effect from 2 January, 1997, when the one-parent family payment (OFP) scheme was introduced. Thereafter, both lone parents and deserted wives came to be supported under the OFP scheme. Some women have continued to get the DWA because they qualified for the payment before the 2 January 1997 cut-off date and because they have continued to satisfy the following conditions to retain entitlement to the payment: be aged over 40 years with no qualified children; satisfy a means test; be inadequately maintained by their husband; not be cohabiting with any person; continue to make appropriate efforts to obtain financial maintenance from their husband; and have not resumed living with, or re-married, their husband.

328 recipients are in receipt of the DWA as of January, 2013 – down from 1,523 recipients in 2003. Given that this payment is no longer available to new applicants, there are no plans to review these arrangements on the grounds that recipients of DWA are a decreasing cohort within the social welfare system and the payment will cease to exist over time.

Carer's Allowance Appeals

324. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a decision on a

carer's allowance will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Cork; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9742/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on 12th November 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 13th February 2013 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.

Social Welfare Appeals Status

325. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection the position regarding a pension in respect of persons (details supplied) in County Kerry. [9773/13]

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 19th February 2013, 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

326. **Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy** asked the Minister for Social Protection when an invalidity pension appeal will be processed in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Offaly; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9795/13]

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 17th January 2013, 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. 327 withdrawn.

Invalidity Pension Appeals

328. **Deputy Paschal Donohoe** asked the Minister for Social Protection when an invalidity pension appeal will be finalised in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Mayo; and if

she will make a statement on the matter. [9804/13]

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 03rd December 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. When received, 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.

Jobseeker's Allowance Appeals

329. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Social Protection if a decision has been made on an appeal of the amount of arrears that issued on a jobseeker's allowance application in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9830/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I am advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that an Appeals Officer having fully considered all the available evidence disallowed the appeal of the person concerned by way of summary decision. The person concerned has been notified of the Appeals Officer decision. The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions on social welfare entitlements.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Appeals

330. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Social Protection the date on which a person (details supplied) in County Cork submitted their appeal in respect of a domiciliary care allowance payment; if all the relevant papers on this appeal have been lodged with the Independent Appeals Office; the average length of time such appeals are currently taking to assess and when a decision may be expected; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9836/13]

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 30th November 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. When received, 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 current average times taken to process domiciliary care allowance appeals decided by summary decision is 34.9 weeks and 42.8 weeks for those requiring an oral appeal 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.

Household Benefits Scheme

331. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will review the arrangement whereby a person (detail supplied) in receipt of disability allowance has been cut off the household benefit package as they live with their child whose income is derived solely from a jobseeker's payment; if she will take steps to address this anomaly whereby qualifying for one benefit results in disqualification for another; and if her attention has been drawn to the financial hardship which this anomaly places on families. [9842/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The household benefits package comprises the electricity or gas allowances, the telephone allowance and the free television licence. The package is generally available to people living in the State who are over age 70, carers who live with the person for whom they care and those under age 70 who are in receipt of certain qualifying social welfare payments and who live alone or only with certain excepted people. "Excepted people" include, inter alia, dependent children, carers or people in need of full time care and attention.

The package is currently paid to over 415,000 customers and will cost an estimated €284 million in 2013. The objective of the scheme is to provide additional support for those who are elderly or live alone. Where a number of people in a household are receiving social welfare payments it is considered that it may not be appropriate to provide additional supports through the household benefits scheme. I would not regard this as an anomaly but as a targeting of a scheme to particularly vulnerable groups. I have no plans to amend the qualifying conditions for this scheme.

Supplementary Welfare Allowance Payments

332. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a decision will be made on an application for a relocation grant lodged by a person (details supplied) in County Galway; the reason for the delay in issuing grant aid; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9845/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Government has provided various types of support to people affected by the November 2009 flooding. Humanitarian Aid payments were made, both in the immediate aftermath of the flooding and subsequently to enable eligible households to resume living at their home. Subject to certain conditions the Government also decided to provide support to a small number of families who are continuing to experience significant housing problems as a result of the November 2009 flooding and are considering the possibility of relocating rather than resuming living at their original home. The legal agreement necessary for the purpose of this scheme was the subject of much detailed discussion and negotiations between this Department, the Office of Public Works (OPW) and the Chief State Solicitor's Office (CSSO). The agreement was finalised and issued to the householders on 5 December 2012.

In view of the legal obligations attaching to the payment of monies in respect of relocation assistance, householders have been advised to seek legal advice prior to signing the agreements. A number of documents, including signed legal agreements, have recently been received from the person concerned and are being considered in the Department in consultation with the Department's legal advisors. The Department will be in further contact with the person concerned when these matters have been finalised. Payment of any amount due under this scheme will only be made when all terms and conditions of the scheme have been satisfied.

Carer's Allowance Appeals

333. **Deputy Seán Kenny** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will onfirm that she received an appeal against the refusal of carer's allowance in respect of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 17 and when this appeal will be decided. [9848/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal, by the person concerned, was registered in that office on 12th February 2013. 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. When received, 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.

Social Welfare Overpayments

334. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 371 of 22 January 2012, if she will re-examine the case of an alleged overpayment in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9865/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): During the period 31 August 2012 to 02 October 2012 the person concerned was paid jobseeker's allowance at a rate of €100 per week. The person concerned will be contacted in order to clarify any further issues arising.

Employment Support Services

335. **Deputy Paudie Coffey** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will provide a list of the new Intreo offices that are currently operating here and a list of the offices that are due to come on stream by the end of 2013; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9878/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Pathways to Work document states that the introduction of the new Intreo service is a multi-annual project. The first ten Intreo offices went live in 2012. These first ten offices were Sligo, Arklow, Tallaght, Kings Inns, Ballymun, Buncrana, Coolock, Dundalk, Finglas and Killarney. The plans for 2013 are now being finalised and details of the office locations to which the new service will be rolled out will be published in due course.

Invalidity Pension Appeals

336. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Social Protection the position regarding an appeal for an invalidity pension in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Laois; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9893/13]

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

17 January 2013, 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.

Fuel Allowance Applications

337. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the progress in respect of an application for fuel allowance in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare when payment will issue; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9904/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The person concerned has been awarded fuel allowance with effect from 11 October 2012. Arrears due for the period 11 October 2012 to 6 February 2013 will be issued to her in the next couple of weeks.

Carer's Allowance Appeals

338. **Deputy Noel Coonan** asked the Minister for Social Protection when an application for a carer's allowance appeal will be finalised in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Tipperary; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9905/13]

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 19 November 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. When received, the appeal in question will be referred in 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.

Pension Provisions

339. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Social Protection when an appeal for a widow's non-contributory pension will be granted in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Laois; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9907/13]

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 21 February 2013 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.

Illness Benefit Appeals

340. **Deputy Emmet Stagg** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason for the delay in dealing with an appeal against disallowance of illness benefit with specific reference to an appeal in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare. [9929/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I am advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that an Appeals Officer having fully considered all the available evidence disallowed the appeal of the person concerned by way of summary decision. The person concerned has been notified of the Appeals Officer decision.

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

Rent Supplement Scheme Applications

341. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will reexamine entitlement to rent allowance in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Carlow; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9930/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Rent allowance for the person concerned has been reinstated following a review of her means. She has been notified in writing of the decision.

Question No. 342 withdrawn.

Jobs Initiative

343. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Social Protection her views on a submission (details supplied); the plans she or the sector has to address the concerns raised; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9934/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I am happy to inform Deputy Wall that the Department facilitated the Craft Council of Ireland in making a presentation to the JobBridge National Internship Steering Committee on 29 January last in respect of this proposal. Officials of the Department have had detailed discussions with representatives of the Craft Council of Ireland in the interim.

The proposal is under active consideration by the Department, with a number of alternative and possible solutions on how best to proceed and I have been advised that Officials of the Department will revert to the Craft Council of Ireland directly on this matter over the coming weeks.

Garda Vetting Applications

344. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Social Protection if her attention has been drawn to the lengthy delays persons on community employment schemes are experiencing in having Garda vetting applications processed; the total number of persons who have not been able to participate on a community employment scheme due to the failure of vetting to

be completed in a timely manner; if she has highlighted such problems to her colleagues; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9940/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Department of Social Protection is committed to the protection and welfare of children and vulnerable adults. Approval to work, or train to work, with children and/or vulnerable adults is granted upon successful completion of the recruitment and selection process which must include vetting checks with the Garda Central Vetting Unit. No individual may work or train with children and/or vulnerable adults pending the outcome of the Garda vetting process.

I am advised that there is an increase in the time taken to process applications in recent months. There are approximately 1,100 DSP applications for Garda vetting currently with the Garda Central Vetting Unit. Of these applications, circa 20% are there over 14 weeks. I understand that this is due to the volume of applications. In response to these demands I understand that additional resources have been allocated to address this matter.

Every effort is being made to ensure that applicants to CE schemes where Garda vetting is required, once a satisfactory outcome is achieved that the applicant can proceed to take up the place.

Child Benefit Eligibility

345. **Deputy Seamus Kirk** asked the Minister for Social Protection if child benefit is paid in respect of children of asylum seekers; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9959/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): An asylum seeker is a person who has applied to the Minister for Justice and Equality for recognition as a refugee in accordance with the Refugee Act 1996, and whose application has not yet been determined.

Section 246(7) of the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005 provides that such a person shall not be regarded as habitually resident and consequently is not eligible for payment of Child Benefit.

Social Welfare Code Review

346. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Social Protection when she received the Mangan Report on child benefit. [9960/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I received the report of the Advisory Group on Tax and Social Welfare on family and child income supports on 28 March 2012. Since receiving the report I have been considering the Group's findings and have held discussions with my Ministerial colleagues on the issues raised in the report.

The Advisory Group's report was subsequently published on 20 February and will now contribute to the policy debate on proposals to reform the structure of child and family income support payments, including the balance between income supports and services, such as childcare. Further consideration of the issues involved is required, taking into account developments in terms of further work by the Advisory Group on social protection and taxation supports for working age persons as well as more general developments in the budgetary and fiscal situation. To this end and to ensure that the Advisory Group's report is considered within the broader public debate on this issue, the report will be considered by the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Social Protection.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Applications

347. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Social Protection the position regarding an application for domiciliary care allowance in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny and if she will expedite same. [9992/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): An application for domiciliary care allowance was received on the 24th April 2012. This application was referred to one of the Department's Medical Assessors who found that the child was not medically eligible for the allowance. A letter issued on the 12th June 2012 advising of the decision.

In the case of an application which is refused on medical grounds the applicant may submit additional information and/or ask for the case to be reviewed or they may appeal the decision directly to the Social Welfare Appeals Office within twenty one days. No correspondence requesting a review of the decision has been received and no appeal has been registered against the decision in this case.

Question No. 348 withdrawn.

National Internship Scheme Numbers

349. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of young persons under 25 years who have participated in the jobbridge scheme to date; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10003/13]

350. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of young persons under 25 years who have participated in the jobbridge scheme to date and who were on the live register for 12 months or more; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10004/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I propose to take Questions 349 and 350 together.

As the Deputy is aware JobBridge is a targeted labour market activation measure intended to assist jobseekers to break the cycle where they are unable to get a job without experience, to provide those seeking employment with the opportunity to gain work experience, maintain close links with the labour market and to enhance their skills and competencies through an internship opportunity, thereby improving their prospects of securing employment in the future. The scheme gives individuals a real opportunity to gain valuable experience to bridge the gap to the beginning of the rest of their working lives.

The JobBridge Scheme has made very impressive progress since it came into operation on the 1st July, 2011. As of 21st February 2013 14,888 internships had commenced, 5,790 participants were on an internship and 2,241 internship opportunities were being advertised on *www.jobbridge.ie* .

In respect of the specific aspect of JobBridge to which the Deputy refers, I can say that, as of 14th February, 2013, 29% or 4,173 of those who have participated in JobBridge internships are under 25 years of age. The independent research found that, of those aged under 25 years, 24.2% had been unemployed for 12 months or more prior to commencing their internship.

Community Employment Scheme Numbers

351. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Social Protection the total number of young persons under 25 years participating in community employment schemes and the most recent total number of participants in community employment schemes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10005/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The number of persons under 25 on Community Employment (CE) as at 25th February is 354. The total number on CE at the same date is 22,458, of whom 1,383 are Supervisors. The standard entry age for CE is 25 but exceptions are made for certain categories such as persons with a disability, Travellers, stabilised drug misusers, refugees, offshore islanders and ex-offenders.

Employment Support Services

352. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Social Protection the total number of young persons under 25 years participating in the Tús initiative and the most recent total number of participants in the Tús initiative; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10006/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): There were a total of 4,446 participants in the Tús initiative at the 31st of January 2013 of which 549 (12.3%) were young persons under the age of 25 years.

Back to Work Allowance Application Numbers

353. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Social Protection the total number of young persons under 25 years receiving the back to work enterprise allowance initiative and the most recent total number of recipients of the back to work enterprise allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10007/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The number of recipients of the back to work enterprise allowance initiative is collated by age on an annual basis for inclusion in the Statistical Information on Social Welfare Services report. I am informed that at the 31st of December 2012 there were a total of 10,810 recipients of the allowance of which 312 (2.9%) were young persons aged under 25 years.

Back to Education Allowance Applications

354. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Social Protection the total number of young persons under 25 years receiving the back to education allowance and the most recent total number of recipients of the back to education allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10008/13]

355. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of young persons under 25 years receiving the back to education allowance to pursue a second level qualification and the number receiving the back to education allowance to pursue a third level qualification; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10009/13]

356. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Social Protection the total number of young persons under 25 years receiving the back to education allowance who were unemployed for 12 months or more prior to participating on the scheme; and if she will make a

statement on the matter. [10010/13]

357. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Social Protection the total number of young persons under 25 years receiving the back to education allowance who were unemployed for 24 months or more prior to participating on the scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10011/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 354 to 357, inclusive, together.

The information requested by the Deputy in respect of unemployment duration prior to commencement on the back to education allowance is not available. I am however informed that there were a total 24,914 recipients of the allowance at the 31st of January 2013 of which 6,585 were young persons under the age of 25 years.

A breakdown of the number of under 25's by qualification level is contained in the following tabular table.

Number of Recipients of Back to Education Allowance at end of January, 2013

	Total Recipients	Under 25 years	Under 25 year olds as a percentage of Total Recipients
Second Level Qualification	8,717	3,715	42.6%
Third Level Qualification	16,197	2,870	17.7%
Back to Education Allowance	24,914	6,585	26.4%

Youth Unemployment Data

358. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Social Protection the top 20 districts with the highest level of youth unemployment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10012/13]

359. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Social Protection the top 20 districts with the highest level of long-term youth unemployment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10013/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 358 and 359 together.

The Social Welfare Offices with the highest numbers of young people registered as unemployed are listed in the tabular statement:

Number of persons under 25 on the Live Register by duration and the top 20 DSP Local Office by level of Youth Unemployment

Live Register	<1 year	>1year	Total
Cork	1,857	991	2,848
Limerick	1,322	903	2,225
Tallaght	1,353	825	2,178

Waterford	1,246	645	1,891
Clondalkin	1,020	694	1,714
Galway	1,158	523	1,681
Newbridge	942	514	1,456
Dundalk	882	470	1,352
Letterkenny	848	437	1,285
Drogheda	803	464	1,267
Bishop Square	820	431	1,251
Wexford	822	420	1,242
Blanchardstown	778	421	1,199
Finglas	703	398	1,101
Kings Inns Street Local Office	677	404	1,081
Tralee	728	282	1,010
Cavan	622	375	997
Coolock	626	322	948
Navan Road	582	352	934
Maynooth	659	251	910

Pensions Reform

360. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Social Protection the progress on the OECD review of pensions policy; when she expects to receive a report from the OECD; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10014/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Secure and adequate finances are one of the fundamental components of a happy and active retirement. The sustainability of the pension system is a particular concern because of the demographic challenges Ireland faces, the associated increases in pension (and other age related) costs, and the deterioration in the public finances. This means that, in the future, the task of financing increased pension spending will fall to a diminishing share of the population as demographic projections indicate the ratio of working age to older people will decrease from 5.3 to 1 at present to 2.1 to 1 by 2060. Life expectancy in Ireland is also increasing and whilst this is very welcome development, it also presents very real and obvious public policy challenges.

Discussions on long term pension policy identified the need for a short and focussed examination on the direction of policy to ensure a modern, sustainable, and adequate pension system taking into account the impact of the economic downturn. It was in this regard that the OECD was commissioned to review long term pension policy in Ireland.

The particular aspects being considered by the OECD include:

- the sustainability of the pension system in the light of demographic and investment challenges;

- the adequacy and coverage levels, in order to ensure adequate income in retirement with a particular focus on the lower and middle income group;

- the modernity of pension systems to ensure flexibility in the labour market and supporting mechanisms for longer working;

- equity within the pension system.

The review was initiated in April 2012. Since then, the OECD has engaged extensively with a range of Government departments, the social partners, older groups and representatives from the pensions industry. A consultation forum including a wide range of stakeholders was held in Farmleigh House in September 2012.

It is anticipated that the final OECD report, which will be used to inform government decisions in this area, will be presented to me in the coming weeks. Following consideration, I will then bring the report to Government before publishing it.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Appeals

361. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will expedite a decision on a domiciliary care allowance appeal in respect of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10027/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I am advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that an Appeals Officer having fully considered all the available evidence, including that adduced at oral hearing, allowed the appeal in this case. The person concerned has been notified of the Appeals Officer decision.

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

362. **Deputy Paul J. Connaughton** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a decision will be made on a disability allowance appeal in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Galway; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10031/13]

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 05th February 2013, 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 Applications

363. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of hours of care required to qualify for carer's allowance in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10036/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I confirm that the department received an application for carer's benefit from the person in question on the 13th March, 2012. A letter issued on the 31st May 2012 refusing the benefit on the grounds that the caree in ques-

tion was not medically eligible for carer's benefit and also that the level of care provided was not adequate for the provision of full-time care and attention as set out in the carer's benefit legislation. In order to qualify for carer's benefit, a person must be providing full-time care and attention to a relevant person.

The person in question subsequently appealed this decision. The outcome of the appeal was that while it was allowed on medical grounds it was disallowed on the provision of full time care and attention. Consequently, the claim remains disallowed. The outcome of the appeal and the reasons for it were communicated to the person concerned in a letter dated 24th January 2013.

An appeals officer's decision is final and conclusive except in the following circumstances:

- in the light of new evidence coming to notice since the decision was made;

- it may be appealed to the High Court but only on a point of law;

- the Chief Appeals Officer may revise any decision where it appears that a mistake was made in relation to the law or the facts. In making a request for such a review, the appellant must state the reasons why they believe a mistake was made regarding the law or the facts.

Jobseeker's Allowance Eligibility

364. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the extent of increase of means in net parental income in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare in view of the obvious deterioration of the family's finances; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10047/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The increase in parental income was due to an increase in net earnings from employment of €66.79 per week and the inclusion of net rental income from property of €134.73 per week. The rental income was not disclosed by the person concerned when he made his jobseeker's allowance claim.

Supplementary Welfare Allowance Applications

365. **Deputy Noel Harrington** asked the Minister for Social Protection the position regarding an appeal for community welfare allowance in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Cork while waiting for their application for disability allowance to be processed; if she will provide an update on the disability allowance application; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10053/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I confirm that the Department is in receipt of an application for disability allowance from the person concerned. On completion of the necessary investigations on all aspects of the claim a decision will be made and he will be notified directly of the outcome.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that a supplementary welfare allowance appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on 07th January 2013. 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 21st January 2013 and the case will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documen-

tary 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.

Supplementary Welfare Allowance Eligibility

366. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 440 of 19 January 2013, if she is implying that a community welfare officer can use their discretion as to whether to continue payment if a person has to leave the country more than once; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10095/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Payment of any allowance under the supplementary welfare allowance scheme (SWA) is governed by legislation. The relevant legislation is relation to the payment of SWA is Section 189 of the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005 which states

"*Subject to this Act, every person in the State whose means are insufficient to meet his or her needs and the needs of any qualified adult or qualified child of the person shall be entitled to supplementary welfare allowance.*".

There is no exemption within the supplementary welfare allowance legislation to allow for payment to continue to persons outside the State and I have no plans to change the conditions under which SWA is payable.

Unemployment Levels

367. **Deputy Patrick Nulty** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of persons registered as unemployed at the Blanchardstown social welfare office, Dublin, in 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012 and to date in 2013, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10096/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The following are figures in tabular form for the number of persons on the Live Register in Blanchardstown Social Welfare Local Office at the end of each of the last 6 years and the figures for 2013 to date. In line with the clarification provided to officials the figures relate to the end of the indicated month.

Year	Month	Register
2007	December	3,436
2008	December	6,128
2009	December	8,280
2010	December	8,801
2011	December	8,562
2012	December	8,272
2013	January	8,443

The full Intreo service will also be launched at Blanchardstown Local Office in the next couple of weeks and this will lead to provision of tailored responses amongst those signing on the Live Register. In addition there will continue to be provided a wide range of education and training opportunities available through my Department, the Department of Education and

Skills and FÁS to enable jobseekers to strengthen their qualifications and skills base and to thus maximise their chances of meeting the requirements of the modern labour market and gaining employment.

My Department is, for example, working closely at present with training and education providers under the Momentum programme to match jobseekers in the Dublin 15 with the available courses. In this regard a special Information Day is being run at the Blanchardstown Centre on 28th February from 12.00 noon until 7.00pm. Officials from my Department and a range of training providers will be present on the day to advise, inform and recruit as many eligible jobseekers as possible onto an appropriate programme.

Family Income Supplement Applications

368. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the position regarding family income supplement in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Wexford; when payment will be reinstated; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10097/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The person concerned applied to have their family income supplement (FIS) payment renewed with effect from 18 October 2012.

Following this re-application, the case of the person concerned was referred to a social welfare inspector to establish and confirm the position regarding family income.

The inspector has been in touch with the person concerned and has arranged an interview to establish the current position regarding their family income. Once the inspector's report is finalised a decision on the entitlement of the person concerned to FIS will be made without delay. The person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

Departmental Websites

369. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for Social Protection her plans to facilitate online applications for benefits noting that in excess of two million claims for payment are made each year; if there is a proposed timeline for the introduction of same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10104/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Public Service Reform plan highlights information and communications technologies (ICT) as key enablers to delivering improved public services. The Department recognises that implementation of the ICT elements of the reform plan will ensure a strong focus on the customer and that better and more innovative use is made of technology to improve the customer experience. To this end, the Department's commitments under the Government strategy document *eGovernment 2012-2015* were published by the Department of Public Expenditure & Reform on 23rd January 2013 on the eGovernment reporting website e.gov.ie.

The Department's eGovernment plans reflect the major programme of business, organisational and technological change underway as it transforms from a passive transaction focused model of income support to a proactive model which is customer centric and progressive. Fundamental to this is developing customer contact channels that maximise customer service and minimise cost of delivery, including online services.

Visits to the Department's website have increased from 3.2 million visits in 2010 to 4 million visits in 2011, and some 5 million visits in 2012. A project to redesign www.welfare.ie

was completed in December 2012 and the new website provides a more dynamic, user-friendly interface for customers, particularly jobseekers, with improved accessibility and search functionality. The new website reflects the extended role and functions of the Department which now includes the Rural Social Scheme and Community Services programme, the Redundancy and Insolvency Payments schemes, the Community Welfare Service and, most notably, the Employment Service programmes. Extensive information on social protection schemes and services is provided on www.welfare.ie and the website will continue to be updated as schemes and services change.

There are a range of online services available on www.welfare.ie. These secure services include online claiming for State Pension Contributory, Child Benefit, Widow(er) or Surviving Partner's (Contributory) Pension, and Redundancy and Insolvency Payments. Online claiming for Jobseekers is also available in 59 local offices.

The new website includes a dedicated sub-site www.intreo.ie providing a single point of information, and access to services, as part of the recently launched Intreo integrated employment and income supports service under the Pathways to Work programme. In addition the 'Find a Job' service on the homepage of www.welfare.ie provides access to an extensive job bank currently hosted at www.jobseeker.fas.ie. Over the coming months and year, as the Pathways to Work programme progresses and the Intreo service is rolled out nationwide, the number and range of online services will be increased.

Potential customer authentication mechanisms under the Public Service Card rollout are also being explored. This will influence the range and type of new online services developed by the Department, including online services for jobseekers.

As well as providing applications for benefits online the Department provides a range of other online services available from the home page of www.welfare.ie. These include 'close my claim' for jobseekers; request a statement of payment; report suspected fraud; request a copy of social insurance record; request an application form; make a comment or complaint; and ask a question.

Under the Department's new *Customer Action Plan 2013–2015*, which is due for publication in Quarter 1 2013, the Department will seek to progress and broaden the range of online services available. The Customer Action Plan has been developed taking account of best practice in this area and involved consultation with members of the public, representative groups and staff of the Department.

I am satisfied that the Department is continuing to seek to develop the range of online services available to our customers in order to secure service improvements and efficiencies.

Social Welfare Benefits Applications

370. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if the existence of extenuating circumstances in the form of a serious illness will be taken into consideration as an admissible explanation for their absence for this jurisdiction and retention of their deserted wives benefit in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10153/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The position remains the same as that detailed in my previous response to the Deputy's Parliamentary Question No 4326/13 on 29th January 2013 regarding this matter.

The review undertaken and the termination of this person's claim was not connected with her need to care for the ill relative abroad: her payment was suspended in July because she failed to reply to the Department's correspondence.

The person concerned was requested to provide certain documentation in support of her continued entitlement. As of today no documentation has been received and the Deciding Officer is not in a position to review claimant's entitlement.

Departmental Agencies Staff Remuneration

371. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will provide details of the payment of bonuses or other performance related payments and or allowances made to the staff of agencies under the aegis of her Department with a yearly breakdown from 2008 outlining the overall amount paid in each year period and the number of staff that received such payments and or allowances. [10171/13]

372. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will provide details of payments made to the CEO or equivalent of all agencies under the aegis of her Department including details of any bonuses, pension entitlements or any other remuneration paid to him or her in 2012. [10188/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I propose to take Question Nos. 371 and 372 together.

The Agencies that operate under the aegis of the Department are the Pensions Board and the Citizens Information Board. The Office of the Pensions Ombudsman also falls under the remit of the Department.

Since 2009, there have been no performance related bonuses to any staff in the organisations concerned. The only bonus paid in respect of performance in 2008 was to the Chief Executive Officer in the Pensions Board who received a bonus of €6,179 in 2009. As the Pensions Board is not funded by the Exchequer, this was not paid for by the State.

The CEOs and the Pensions Ombudsman are ordinary members of their organisations superannuation schemes and their entitlements do not extend beyond the normal entitlements of the standard public/civil service superannuation scheme.

The remuneration, which comprises basic salary for the CEOs and Pensions Ombudsman in respect of 2012 was as follows:

CEO in the Pensions Board - €153,885

CEO in the Citizens information Board - €117,570

Pensions Ombudsman - €125,655

Rent Supplement Scheme Eligibility

373. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the correct 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. [10202/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The person concerned is no longer

at the address that he originally applied for rent supplement from. The client must make an application for rent supplement before our Department can establish an entitlement. All information in relation to the access of his children must also accompany this application. If the person concerned wishes to apply for rent supplement he should complete an application form and return it to the Central Rents Unit, PO Box 11758, Dublin 24.

Questions Nos. 374 and 375 withdrawn.

Invalidity Pension Applications

376. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason she refused an application for invalidity pension in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Cork who is incapable of work; the reason she did not order a medical assessment of the person before a decision was made; if she will clarify the payment available to a person that has been on illness benefit for a period of 24 months and is still incapable of work; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10287/13]

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

This department received a claim for invalidity pension for the person concerned on 21September 2012. The medical evidence provided by the claimant in support of his claim for invalidity pension was examined by a medical assessor who was of the opinion that the person concerned is not eligible as he does not satisfy the medical criteria. The application for invalidity pension was, accordingly, disallowed by a deciding officer. The applicant was notified of this decision on 6 December 2012 and advised of his right to request a review of the decision and also of his right to lodge an appeal with the social welfare appeals office. To date no correspondence has been received from the person concerned.

Customers waiting for the outcome of a review, who have urgent income support needs, can apply for the means tested supplementary welfare allowance (SWA) from their local Community Welfare Officer.

Exceptional Needs Payment Eligibility

377. **Deputy Seamus Healy** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will withdraw S.W.A. Circular No 1/2013 Paragraph 4.1 which abolishes exceptional needs payments to needy families for communion and confirmation, particularly in view of the fact that child benefit payments have again been reduced in 2013; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10314/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Under the supplementary welfare allowance (SWA) scheme, the Department may make a single exceptional needs payment (ENP) to help meet essential, once-off, exceptional and unforeseen expenditure which a person could not reasonably be expected to meet out of their weekly income. There is no automatic entitlement to a payment. ENPs are payable at the discretion of the officers administering the scheme taking into account the requirements of the legislation and all the relevant circumstances of the case in order to ensure that the payments target those most in need of assistance. The Government has provided €47.6m for the scheme in 2013.

A review of the guidelines on exceptional needs payments was carried out by the Department by a working group made up of former community welfare service staff. One of the recommendations emanating from this review is to address the different approaches taken, in different areas, in relation to the payment of ENPs in respect of religious ceremonies, mainly Communions and Confirmations and to ensure that the SWA scheme is responding to financial need and not occasions.

For 2013, the Department has recommended that payment of the allowance specifically in respect of religious ceremonies will cease. Applications can continue to be made under the scheme for assistance with child clothing.

I have no plans to reverse this position as these measures will ensure that the ENP Scheme will continue to respond to specific need and not to the occasion.

Persons who consider that they have an entitlement to an ENP under the supplementary welfare allowance scheme should contact the local officials administering the scheme.

Carer's Allowance Appeals

378. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the progress made on an appeal for carer's allowance in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10357/13]

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 17th January 2013. 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. When received, 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.

Wildlife Protection

379. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if his attention has been drawn to the increase in the number of dead seals found on Irish coasts in the past 12 months, monitored by the Irish Seal Sanctuary who have reported some seals with wounds consistent with gunshot wounds, others with injuries and damage and euthanised by a vet; and the action he will take to prevent and reduce the incidents of seal deaths across the country. [9741/13]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan): Seals are protected under the Wildlife Acts and their key habitats require protection under the EU Habitats Directive.

My Department was greatly concerned about the situation in Waterford in February 2012 where dead seals were found washed up on shore at that time. Officials worked with An Garda Síochána and others to investigate the deaths of these seals, including the possibility that they were killed illegally. However, as it was not possible to determine exactly when or where the

seals had died in this case, it was not possible to bring prosecutions.

In recent months, officials of my Department have responded to information received from the Irish Seal Sanctuary and others regarding dead seals on the Waterford and Wexford coasts. These specimens have also been investigated but none were confirmed to have sustained gun-shot wounds. One specimen was the subject of a necropsy examination. In this case, the cause of death appeared to be linked to neoplasia or cancerous growths.

Departmental officials working in coastal areas remain particularly vigilant during the seal breeding season and will continue to work closely with other law enforcement authorities in such situations.

Architectural Heritage

380. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the position regarding renovation works at Killarney House, County Kerry; if he will give a full account of works and expenditure to date and works and expenditure to come; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9561/13]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan): In 2011, I announced a major refurbishment programme for Killarney House and its ornamental grounds and gardens. The House will be developed as the main visitor and interpretative centre for the National Park, highlighting the beauty and interpreting the richness and significance of the Park's landscapes, habitats, flora and fauna, as well as telling the story of human interaction with the Park over the centuries. It is also intended that some of the formal rooms will be restored to their former glory.

This is a major project for my Department and involves collaboration with OPW, as the project managers, and Fáilte Ireland, which has committed funding of €5.2 million under its Tourism Capital Investment Programme.

A phased approach to the restoration has been adopted and, to date, two contracts totalling €1,027,767 (excl. VAT) have been awarded for Phase I and Phase II works. These first two phases were required to safeguard the structural integrity and to create the optimal internal layout of the House in preparation for the full restoration works. Phase I was completed early last year and Phase II is due to be completed this week.

The next phases of works will include the full refurbishment of the main building; the construction of a new extension; the exhibition fit-out; and extensive landscaping and other works to the ornamental grounds and gardens. Planning permission has already been granted for works to the ornamental grounds and gardens. I am advised that a planning application for the major element of the House restoration project is being finalised by OPW at present. It is planned that substantive works on both the house and gardens will progress in the latter half of 2013, with completion planned for 2014.

National Parks Projects

381. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the position regarding a project (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9563/13]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan): The Deputy

will appreciate that, given the constraints that apply to a "details supplied" Question, I am precluded from providing as much information in my response as I might wish.

Having regard to the ecological considerations associated with the project referred to, the task of delivering it will need careful consideration and planning. The project will involve the collaboration of a number of stakeholders and, to this end, in July 2012 I convened a Steering Group involving representatives of those stakeholders. The Steering Group has been charged with the development and roll-out of the project, and will oversee the detailed design and planning required, thus ensuring that local knowledge of the area is incorporated into the development process.

In order to ensure that the project is delivered as efficiently and quickly as possible, it has been broken down into various components or modules. This modular approach has allowed the advancement of some components, while the necessary consultations, assessments and planning required for the other more complicated aspects of the plan are moved along in parallel. At this stage, I am satisfied that significant progress is being made and, insofar as possible within the constraints of the public finances, I will seek to ensure that there are no avoidable delays in bringing the project to completion.

Gníomhaireachtaí Rannach

382. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Dara Calleary** den Aire Ealaíon, Oidhreachta agus Gaeltachta cén méid airgid in aghaidh na cóipe a thugann Foras na Gaeilge mar mhaoiniú ar fhoilseacháin, amhail Gaelscéal, Comhar, Feasta agus aon fhoilseacháin eile. [9726/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Dinny McGinley): Tuigim ó Fhoras na Gaeilge go gcuirtear maoiniú ar fáil d'irisí áirithe chun freastal ar shainmhargaí ar leith. Is sainmhargaí iad seo nach ndéanfaí freastal, nó an freastal céanna, orthu gan an maoiniú sin. Mar shampla, tá cáil ar leith ar chuid de na hirisí liteartha ar nós *Comhar*. Bíonn irisí eile dírithe ar riachtanais earnálacha agus eagraíochtúla, ar nós *Feasta* agus *An tUltach*. Is scéim phíolótach atá i gceist le *NÓSmag* , iris atá dírithe ar shainspéiseanna na hóige. Mar chuid den chonradh, cuirtear na seaneagráin den iris, mar aon le blaiseadh den eagrán is deireanaí, ar fáil don phobal saor in aisce ar líne.

Ní miste a shoiléiriú nach ionann an nuachtán *Gaelscéal* agus na hirisí eile atá luaite ag an Teachta. Murab ionann is *Gaelscéal*, ní dhíoltar na hirisí sin sna siopaí ach cuirtear iad ar fáil ar bhonn síntiúis bliana. Tuigtear dom gur chuir Foras na Gaeilge maoiniú de €400,000 ar fáil don nuachtán *Gaelscéal* in 2012 agus gurb é an meándíolachán a bhí air ná 1,314 cóip in aghaidh na seachtaine.

Ó thaobh irisí de, leagtar amach sa tábla seo a leanas an maoiniú a chuir Foras na Gaeilge ar fáil dóibh in 2012:

Irisí	Maoiniú in 2012
Comhar	€80,000
Feasta	€41,487
NÓSmag* (Bealtaine-Nollaig)	€24,000
An tUltach	€17,108
An Timire	€3,326
An Sagart	€2,622

Departmental Bodies Expenditure

383. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghaíl** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if he will quantify and set out in itemised detail pertaining and relevant individually to each body and institution under his remit the €1 million he has stated he expects from savings that will be made initially across the institutions involved in the public sector reform programme which are funded from his Department's Vote group; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9780/13]

384. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghaíl** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if he will quantify and set out in itemised detail the further savings he states he expects from the public sector reform programme of the cultural institutions under his remit over and above the €1 million he estimates in savings from that programme as the various cost-saving measures are implemented going forward; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9781/13]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 383 and 384 together.

As the Deputy will be aware, the Public Service Reform Plan published by the Government on 17th November 2011 outlined a series of rationalisation measures, some of which related to a number of the bodies funded from my Department's Vote Group. In this regard, my Department conducted a critical examination of the structure and operation of the bodies included in the Public Service Reform Plan and developed a comprehensive and practical approach to the implementation of the various Government Decisions in this area, which was endorsed by the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform.

Summary documents which outline the main outcomes of this examination in relation to the relevant bodies and institutions have been published on my Department's website.

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

Savings are being made primarily in three key ways:

- Ending of payments to chairpersons and members of boards or advisory councils – it is expected that approximately €300,000 will be saved in this regard.

- Implementation of a programme of shared services between institutions, including, for example, in retail, security, marketing, procurement and storage – it is expected that approximately €150,000 per annum will be achieved.

- Provision of services by my Department to some institutions, including human resources services and financial services, thereby relieving those institutions of the need to incur a cost in accessing these services – creating estimated savings of €550,000.

My Department is working closely with the Directors of the relevant institutions and bodies to progress the reform programme and real progress is being made across all the bodies concerned.

Waterways Ireland Feasibility Study

385. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the reason the Waterways Feasibility Study was not carried out in 2012 as previously suggested. [9956/13]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan): I assume the Deputy is referring to the feasibility study of an extension of the Longford Branch of the Royal Canal.

I can confirm to the Deputy that the Waterways Ireland Corporate Plan for the period 2011-2013, which has been approved by the North/South Ministerial Council, states that Waterways Ireland will complete the feasibility study of an extension of the Longford Branch of the Royal Canal with a target date of December 2013. I understand that work is on target in this regard.

Irish Language Issues

386. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if he has had any recent discussions with members of the Northern Ireland Executive in relation to the Irish Language Act; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10107/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Dinny McGinley): I refer the Deputy to my reply to Parliamentary Question No. 171 on 20 December 2012.

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, Ms Carál Ní Chuilín, MLA, launched a public consultation process in 2012 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* .

The Deputy will appreciate that matters relating to the Irish language are discussed regularly at meetings with Minister Ní Chuilín and her Department, and indeed within the context of the North South Ministerial Council meeting in language sectoral format. The next such meeting of the Council is due to take place on 6 March 2013.

Departmental Agencies Staff Remuneration

387. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if he will provide details of the payment of bonuses or other performance related payments and or allowances made to the staff of agencies under the aegis of his Department with a yearly breakdown from 2008 outlining the overall amount paid in each year period and the number of staff that received such payments and or allowances. [10159/13]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan): I am advised that payments of the nature referred to by the Deputy in bodies/agencies funded from my Department's Vote Group during the period in question were as listed below. No other such payments arise in the years 2008-2012.

Irish Film Board:

2008 - bonus payment of €22,275 to CEO

National Concert Hall:

2008 - bonus payment of €18,500 to Director

2008 - merit payments totalling €55,110 to 128 staff

2009 - merit payments totalling €32,950 to 114 staff

2010 - merit payments totalling €34,481 to 111 staff

2011 - merit payments totalling €31,038 to 112 staff

2012 - merit payments totalling €27,863 to 105 staff

Údaras na Gaeltachta:

2008 - bonus payment of €26,134 to CEO

2008 - merit payments totalling €84,050 to 15 staff

2009 - bonus payment of €26,134 to CEO

Ulster-Scots Agency:

2008 - merit payments totalling £4,380stg to 5 staff

Waterways Ireland:

2008 - bonus payment of £8,000stg to CEO (in respect of 2006)

2010 – bonus payment of £8,500stg to CEO (in respect of 2007)

Departmental Agencies Staff Remuneration

388. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if he will provide details of payments made to the CEO or equivalent of all agencies under the aegis of his Department including details of any bonuses, pension entitlements or any other remuneration paid to him or her in 2012. [10176/13]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan): The information requested by the Deputy is set out in the table below. The Deputy should note that all payments were made in line with sanctions received and that no bonus payments were made in 2012 to any CEOs/Directors in bodies/agencies funded from my Department's Vote Group.

Body	Payments in 2012(Salary unless indicated)
Arts Council	€85,538
Ulster-Scots Agency	£45,927(sterling)
Irish Film Board	€101,234
Chester Beatty Library	€96,295
Crawford Art Gallery	€76,058
Foras na Gaeilge	€121,118
Heritage Council	€116,795
Irish Museum of Modern Art*	€57,002 (23/4/2012-31/12/2012)
National Concert Hall	€108,488 (comprising €97,000 salary, €10,670 pension contribution, €818 health insurance)
National Library of Ireland	€96,514
National Museum of Ireland**	Former Director (1/1/12-29/02/12) €20,072Acting Director (1/3/12-31/3/12) €85,472, including acting-up allowance of €2,478
Údarás na Gaeltachta	Interim CEO (1/1/12-30/4/12) €20,916 ***New CEO (1/6/12-31/12/12) €78,750
Waterways Ireland	£92,636 (sterling)
National Gallery of Ireland	€76,940 (16/4/12-31/12/12)
National Archives**	Acting Director €86,932, including acting-up allowance of €9,056

**Position vacant from 1/1/12 to 23/4/12.*

***Posts currently being filled on an acting basis under sanction.*

****The former CEO was re-engaged as interim CEO for a 4 month period, with the pension abatement principle being applied.*

Carbon Monoxide Poisoning Scheme

389. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will respond to the documentation (details supplied) regarding OFTEC Ireland. [9653/13]

395. **Deputy Michael McCarthy** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources his plans to establish a mandatory registration scheme for the oil heating and cooking industry here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9811/13]

396. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he proposes to introduce a registration scheme for oil heating engineers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9834/13]

397. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural

Resources his plans to set up a mandatory register of oil installers and service technicians in 2013 similiar to that which applies for RGII and RECI; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9844/13]

398. **Deputy Nicky McFadden** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will establish a registration scheme similar to RGII and RECI to regulate oil boiler installation and servicing workers in order to ensure that only competent technicians are permitted to install, commission and service heating appliances; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9862/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): I propose to take Questions Nos. 389 and 395 to 398, inclusive, together.

I assume that the Deputies are referring to the potential dangers that may result from faulty installations, especially carbon monoxide gas, which would be dangerous to people in their homes and at their places of work. In that regard, I was pleased to launch the first Carbon Monoxide Awareness Week on the 24th September 2012. The Awareness Week saw a sustained, multi-media publicity campaign to alert people to the dangers posed by carbon monoxide and to give them advice as to what they should do to be safe. The issue was widely reported on television, on national and local radio and in both national and local press.

In respect of the possibility for a mandatory registration scheme for oil technicians, similar to those in place for the gas (RGII) and electricity (RECI) industries, I have asked my officials to meet with industry representatives to discuss the matter and I await the outcome of such discussions.

Tourism Promotion

390. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the progress made by Inland Fisheries Ireland in developing the tourism potential of our inland rivers and lakes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9691/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): The functions of Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) are the protection, management and conservation of the inland fisheries resource, which contribute directly to the development of the sector's tourism potential. IFI actively promotes the potential of our inland fisheries resource, and on its establishment in 2010, set up a Business Development Division to further develop the potential of the inland fisheries sector with a special interest in promoting the tourism potential of the sector. IFI also works with Tourism Ireland to promote angling tourism.

The following promotional activities are undertaken by IFI on a routine basis:

- Daily updates to the www.fishinginireland.info website with the latest information for anglers. In 2012 80,000 referrals were made via the IFI website. Frequent updates to FACEBOOK and Twitter. FACEBOOK currently provides a reach to 750,000 individuals.

- Weekly publication and circulation of the IFI online magazine Angling Ezine in providing information on the best angling available in Ireland to a very wide group.

- Up to 15 Trade Shows are attended by IFI annually in Ireland, UK, Germany, France, Netherlands, Belgium, Italy and the US promoting Ireland as a prime angling tourism destination.

In addition, IFI has produced a number of new angling guides, maps and leaflets, reprinted a number of guides and produced high quality promotional material. The most recent of these published are:

- Mayo Game Angling Guide

- Sligo Game Angling Guide

- Boyne Valley Angling Guide

- Lough O'Flynn & River Suck Angling Guide

- South West Angling Guide

Guides are produced in hard copy and electronically and a number are available in French and or German. Staff in IFI support visiting angling journalists, up to 30 a year, in promoting the best of Irish angling through various articles and blogs in Irish, UK, European and US Press.

In 2012 IFI commissioned a major survey of recreational angling in Ireland. This important research focuses on domestic and overseas anglers, fish species of interest, estimates of expenditure and other data with a view to improving the quality of angling and to benchmark the Irish angling experience against competitor destinations.

In addition IFI will shortly launch a revamped website and an angling App which will provide information on angling resources nationwide. IFI also operates a pilot sponsorship programme and a large variety of events have been sponsored including major competitions such as the World Pairs, The Rosslare Small Boats Competition, The Dutch King of Clubs and the upcoming World Youth Fly Fishing Championship. These events bring hundreds of visitors to Ireland.

In addition to these direct measures, IFI is working with my Department on a major project to modernise, consolidate and simplify the law pertaining to inland fisheries, which is well advanced and which will serve the sector well into the future. The review of legislation will go to public consultation in the near future. A key overriding objective of this project is to put in place the legislative basis to allow IFI to develop the potential of the sector, mainly by increasing the number of anglers utilising the resource, empowering stakeholders to take an active role in the development of the resource and to maximise the returns from the inland fisheries resource to local communities and the State.

Hydraulic Fracturing Policy

391. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if his attention has been drawn to the latest reports and findings on unconventional gas exploration and extraction in Germany of November 2012 and the presentation given by Mr Helmut Fehr, Kreis Steinfurt, to local groups in County Leitrim last month in relation to the district of Steinfurt in Germany who have decided to meet the challenges related to the rising costs of energy and the upcoming shortage of fossil fuels, and if he will outline from the information provided whether he would integrate this material into any further investigation of the Irish research (details supplied). [9735/13]

392. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he proposes to explore the regional economic impact of hydrofracking and gas production here using the German model (details supplied) and the way his Department will

deal with each issue raised. [9736/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): I propose to take Questions Nos. 391 and 392 together.

I understand that on 4th February, 2012, German politician and scientific advisor Helmut Fehr presented a talk at a public meeting in Drumshanbo, County Leitrim, on how fracking might affect rural areas.

I understand that amongst other views, he expressed his belief that the Environmental Protection Agency should have the last word on whether fracking goes ahead and that its German counterpart is due to release a comprehensive report in November of this year. He is also understood to have indicated that there should be no further fracking until certain questions are answered and gaps in knowledge and legislation are addressed.

As the Deputy may be aware, as I have made it clear on a number of occasions, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has commenced a process to issue a public call inviting interested parties to tender for the offer of funding from both the EPA Strive Programme and my Department to conduct detailed research on the use of Unconventional Gas Exploration and Extraction in Ireland, in particular with regard to the use of hydraulic fracturing (fracking) technology. The study follows on from the preliminary research into the environmental aspects of shale gas extraction, conducted by the University of Aberdeen, which was published by the EPA in May 2012.

The proposed terms of reference for this study, which includes consideration of the regulatory approaches of other countries that have extensive experience with this activity, have been developed and are currently the subject of a Public Consultation Process, which was launched on 11 January 2013. Interested parties have been invited to submit written comments by 8 March 2013. Further details are available from the EPA website (www.epa.ie). The final results of this study are expected in early 2015.

As I have confirmed to the House on a number of previous occasions, no decision will be made on any proposal for the use of hydraulic fracturing in exploration drilling in Ireland until there has been time to consider the outcome of this further EPA research.

Broadband Services Provision

393. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources his plans to improve broadband coverage in an area (details supplied) in County Mayo; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9778/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): Ireland's telecommunications market has been liberalised since 1999 and since then has developed into a well-regulated market, supporting a multiplicity of commercial operators, providing services over a diverse range of technology platforms. Details of broadband services available on a county-by-county basis can be found on the website of the Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg) at www.callcosts.ie.

The Government has undertaken a number of initiatives to bring broadband to those parts of the country where operators have been unable to offer services on a commercial basis.

The State only becomes involved in the provision of services in instances of clear market failure, such as in the case of the National Broadband Scheme (NBS) and the Rural Broad-

band Scheme (RBS). My Department entered into a contract in late 2008 with Hutchison 3G Ireland Ltd ("3") for the delivery of the NBS. The Scheme offers a basic broadband service, in line with EU State aid clearance, to fixed residences and businesses located within certain designated Electoral Divisions. In County Mayo, NBS services are available within 112 of its 154 Electoral Divisions. The general area of Kilmovee was excluded from the NBS since at the time of mapping exercise carried out prior to the launch of the Scheme it was found to be served. The NBS is prohibited under State Aid and competition rules from providing a service in served areas where to do so would give rise to an unacceptable level of market distortion.

The RBS was launched in 2011 in recognition of the fact that despite the widespread availability of broadband throughout Ireland, there still remained individual premises that were unable to receive broadband provision. This Scheme was aimed at making a basic broadband service available to un-served premises in rural areas, not already covered by the NBS. Commercial service providers were in a position to offer services to all applicants from County Mayo under the Scheme who agreed to engage with them.

In addition to consumer services, State-funded Metropolitan Area Networks which provide high capacity fibre connectivity for businesses and telecoms operators in the regions are located in Ballina, Ballinrobe, Belmullet, Claremorris, Kiltimagh and Knock in County Mayo.

The combination of private investment and State interventions means that Ireland has met the EU Commission's Digital Agenda for Europe target of having a basic broadband service available to all areas by 2013, and the focus is now on accelerating the roll out of high speed services.

The Government's National Broadband Plan, which I published in August last, aims to radically change the broadband landscape in Ireland by ensuring that high speed services of at least 30Mbps are available to all of our citizens and businesses, well in advance of the EU's target date of 2020, and that significantly higher speeds are available to as many homes and businesses as possible.

Specifically, it commits to:

- 70Mbps to 100Mbps available from the commercial market operators to more than half of the population by 2015,

- At least 40Mbps, and in many cases faster speeds, to at least a further 20% and potentially as much as 35% of the population, and

- A minimum of 30Mbps for every remaining home and business in the country.

During the preparation of Ireland's National Broadband Plan, the commercial market operators indicated that they expect to provide 70Mbps to 100Mbps services to 50% of the population by 2015. The commercial sector is already making these investments in high speed services, particularly in urban and semi-urban areas. The Government is also committed in the Plan to investing in areas where high speed services are not commercially viable and will not be provided by the market.

My Department is making preparations to commence a formal national mapping exercise to inform the level of Government interaction that may be required and the areas that need to be targeted for a State-led investment. It will also form a critical input to an EU State Aid application in respect of any State-led intervention.

Through the implementation of the National Broadband Plan, we are committed to increasing the availability of next generation speeds significantly, with a view to ensuring that all citi-

zens and business can participate fully in a digitally enabled society.

I would reiterate that the Government remains committed to the delivery of the speeds referred to above, to ensure that all parts of Ireland, including County Mayo, will have at least 30Mbps connectivity.

Electricity Transmission Network

394. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will provide details of any future plans by EirGrid to construct high-capacity transmission lines in western Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9807/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): EirGrid's Grid25 programme is a strategy designed to develop the transmission networks in order to ensure safe, secure and affordable electricity supplies throughout Ireland supporting economic growth, renewable and sustainable energy. The Government endorses this major investment programme currently underway in the high voltage electricity transmission system. Grid25 is the most important investment in Ireland's transmission system for several generations and will position our energy system for decades to come.

The transmission system in Ireland, managed and operated by EirGrid, consists of three voltage levels of high capacity lines. It is operated at 400 kV, 220 kV and 110 kV.

In 2012 significant progress was made in a number of Grid25 regions in relation to construction, uprating and refurbishment of over 200km of existing circuits and there is currently 2000 megawatts of wind power installed on the Island of Ireland.

Significant progress has been made on the Grid West project since it was launched in May 2012 and extensive public consultation has occurred over the last 9 months. The project will be moving to a key stage in the coming weeks with the publication of the Stage 1 Report which will indicate a number of potential corridors that can accommodate this new transmission line following all the information on the study area gathered today. EirGrid is encouraging anyone with an interest in the project to participate in the upcoming consultation.

The Grid West project will initially consist of a new high capacity power line, but based on the region's renewable potential, it is envisaged that in time, a second line will be required. The pace of installation of the second line is dependent on a number of factors including the speed at which further renewable energy generation is developed in the region.

EirGrid is also developing a West Galway project consisting of a new 110kV electricity substation to allow renewable generation to connect to the transmission grid. The project calls for a new electrical substation to connect into a planned 110kV distribution line running from Salthill to Screeb, County Galway. The project will increase security of energy supply to the region and enable Galway to be a net exporter of renewable energy. A planning application is expected to be submitted shortly to An Bord Pleanála.

From the south west to the north west of Ireland, to meet requirements of customers and generators, EirGrid is currently upgrading and developing new high capacity lines and stations, many of which have recently obtained planning permission. Where possible, EirGrid aims to maximise existing network to accommodate increased line capacity.

Jointly with NIE (Northern Ireland Electricity), EirGrid is progressing the RIDP project

(Renewable Integration Development Project) aimed at facilitating the development of renewable energy in Donegal and Northern Ireland.

EirGrid is constantly reviewing grid development requirements and produces information to inform market participants, customers, and policy makers regarding the generation capacity required to achieve an adequate supply and demand balance across Ireland.

EirGrid has published its plans to upgrade and develop extensively the transmission system in Ireland, and has recently undertaken a briefing for all Oireachtas members with regard to progress made on Grid25. EirGrid would be happy to meet with any members of the Oireachtas in relation to any aspects of Grid25.

Questions Nos. 395 to 398, inclusive, answered with Question No. 389.

Broadband Services Provision

399. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources his plans to extend the provision of broadband to an area (details supplied) in County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9874/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): Ireland's telecommunications market has been liberalised since 1999 and since then has developed into a well-regulated market, supporting a multiplicity of commercial operators, providing services over a diverse range of technology platforms. Details of broadband services available on a county-by-county basis can be found on the website of the Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg) at www.callcosts.ie. Decisions by Eircom relating to investment in infrastructure to provide broadband services, including the upgrading of local exchanges, are taken purely on commercial grounds and as such are not one in which I have a statutory role.

The Government has undertaken a number of initiatives to bring broadband to those parts of the country where operators have been unable to offer services on a commercial basis.

The State only becomes involved in the provision of services in instances of clear market failure, such as in the case of the National Broadband Scheme (NBS) and the Rural Broadband Scheme (RBS). My Department entered into a contract in late 2008 with Hutchison 3G Ireland Ltd ("3") for the delivery of the NBS. The Scheme offers a basic broadband service, in line with EU State aid clearance, to fixed residences and businesses located within certain designated Electoral Divisions. In County Clare, NBS services are available within 49 of its 155 Electoral Divisions, including the general area of Lissycasey. Fixed residences and businesses in the area can therefore apply for a broadband connection from "3" under the NBS. Lissycasey is not covered under the RBS which was aimed at making a basic broadband service available to un-served premises in rural areas, not already covered by the NBS.

In addition to consumer services, a State-funded Metropolitan Area Network which provides high capacity fibre connectivity for businesses and telecoms operators is located in Kilrush in County Clare.

The combination of private investment and State interventions means that Ireland has met the EU Commission's Digital Agenda for Europe target of having a basic broadband service available to all areas by 2013, and the focus is now on accelerating the roll out of high speed services.

The Government's National Broadband Plan, which I published in August last, aims to

radically change the broadband landscape in Ireland by ensuring that high speed services of at least 30Mbps are available to all of our citizens and businesses, well in advance of the EU's target date of 2020, and that significantly higher speeds are available to as many homes and businesses as possible.

Specifically, it commits to:

- 70Mbps to 100Mbps available from the commercial market operators to more than half of the population by 2015,

- At least 40Mbps, and in many cases faster speeds, to at least a further 20% and potentially as much as 35% of the population, and

- A minimum of 30Mbps for every remaining home and business in the country.

During the preparation of Ireland's National Broadband Plan, the commercial market operators indicated that they expect to provide 70Mbps to 100Mbps services to 50% of the population by 2015. The commercial sector is already making these investments in high speed services, particularly in urban and semi-urban areas. The Government is also committed in the Plan to investing in areas where high speed services are not commercially viable and will not be provided by the market.

My Department is making preparations to commence a formal national mapping exercise to inform the level of Government interaction that may be required and the areas that need to be targeted for a State-led investment. It will also form a critical input to an EU State Aid application in respect of any State-led intervention.

Through the implementation of the National Broadband Plan, we are committed to increasing the availability of next generation speeds significantly, with a view to ensuring that all citizens and business can participate fully in a digitally enabled society.

I would reiterate that the Government remains committed to the delivery of the speeds referred to above, to ensure that all parts of Ireland, including County Clare, will have at least 30Mbps connectivity.

Electricity Transmission Network

400. **Deputy Paudie Coffey** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if there are any plans for the development of an electricity interconnector between Ireland and mainland Europe; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9879/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): Security of energy supply is a key imperative for Ireland and the European Union. The relatively small size of the Irish electricity market underlines the need for greater interconnection as a means of enhancing security of supply, promoting competition and integrating the Irish electricity market into the wider European market.

The Government is committed to achieving enhanced interconnection on the island of Ireland, as well as with Britain, as evidenced by the launch of the East West Interconnector (EWIC). Greater interconnection is also the way forward envisaged at European level to achieve further electricity and gas market integration and the European internal energy market.

A possible future Ireland/France interconnector is currently being envisaged by EirGrid. While this is currently in the conceptual stage of development by EirGrid and the French Trans-

mission System Operator, RTE, it may be submitted in 2015 as a Project of Common Interest under the EU Energy Infrastructure Package, subject to what emerges from that process.

Fisheries Protection

401. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the total allowable catch for salmon on the River Moy between the years 1984 and 1994 inclusive; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9914/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Fergus O'Dowd): The Wild Salmon and Sea Trout Tagging Scheme commenced for both commercial and recreational salmon fishing licence holders on 1st January 2001, having been provided for in the Fisheries (Amendment) Act, 1999 (No. 35 of 1999). This was followed by the introduction of Total Allowable Catches (TAC) for the commercial salmon fishing sector and bag limits for recreational anglers in 2002. As TACs were only introduced in 2002 there is no TAC data for the years requested by the Deputy. However, Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) does have catch related data for the period and would be happy to share that with the Deputy. I have requested IFI in Mayo to meet with the Deputy to explain the data. IFI may be contacted at 096 22788 to set up the meeting at a mutually convenient time.

Exploration Licences Approvals

402. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will keep this Deputy informed of any applications from a company (details supplied) to commence exploration for oil/gas in its exploration licence area off the Dublin coast. [9997/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Fergus O'Dowd): I can assure the Deputy that, where relevant, information will be placed in the public domain.

Electricity Generation

403. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will extend the REFIT scheme to accommodate electricity generators who are disadvantaged by slow grid development; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10034/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): Within the REFIT schemes, each project will have a unique and individual file history. Renewable energy projects may be delayed from proceeding for several reasons. Some projects may be delayed as a result of a personal decision by a project developer relating to their particular circumstances; others may be delayed due to a decision by a developer to reconfigure their project, which might require a new planning permission application to be made and requires negotiation, discussion and agreement with the Transmission or Distribution System operator; some projects may be delayed due to uncertainty around aspects of market rules and the effect final rules may have projects; others may be delayed due to difficulty in obtaining finance etc.

I recognise that there are a number of complex factors that are converging for the renewable energy development sector at the present time, which may mean that it has not been possible

to develop projects in the timeframe project developers may have originally anticipated. Guidance on renewable energy support schemes from the European Commission is due to be published in the first half of the year. Support schemes and aspects of the existing REFIT schemes are an area currently under consideration in my Department, with a view to providing clarity to developers on all applicable terms and conditions.

Alternative Energy Projects

404. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources in view of the recent signing of a Memorandum of Understanding with the British Government for the support of electricity generated by wind energy from the State, the plans that are in place to attract wind turbines manufacturing companies here to set up new operations; the progress that has been made in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10035/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): The Memorandum of Understanding on energy cooperation that UK Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change, Edward Davey and I signed on 24 January will result in completion of consideration of how Irish renewable energy resources might be developed to the mutual benefit of Ireland and the United Kingdom. This will determine whether it is beneficial for both countries to enter into an Inter-Governmental Agreement under the Renewable Energy Directive to provide for renewable energy trading.

If an Inter-Governmental Agreement is entered into, there are potential significant employment opportunities. As an example, employment creation arising from 3,000MW of new renewable wind generation would be expected to be in the order of 3,000 to 6,000 job years in the construction phase, with the actual number dependent on the construction schedule to 2020. There would also be additional jobs created in the ongoing maintenance of turbines over a 20-year operating life.

Further employment opportunities could arise if turbines or components were to be manufactured in Ireland. Policy certainly is important in that regard. Additionally, all relevant State agencies, particularly in the enterprise area, would have to coordinate their activities early in the process to ensure employment potential of export projects is maximised. This opportunity has already been identified by the IDA and Enterprise Ireland in their clean technology growth strategies. Accordingly it would be a matter in the first instance for these Agencies to pursue the potential enterprise opportunities arising for the State in the area of turbine or component manufacturing.

EU Presidency Priorities

405. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the proposals he has to advance the EU digital economy during the Irish Presidency of the EU; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8925/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): Ireland's overall goal during our Presidency is to ensure that the efforts of the EU are focussed on the steps necessary to restore economic stability and promote jobs and growth. In Ireland and across Europe, the digital economy is considered to be a key enabler for stability, jobs, growth and social inclusion. For this reason, as chair of the Transport, Telecommunications and Energy Council, I have prioritised a number of initiatives that support the implementation of the

Digital Single Market and the Digital Agenda for Europe.

An important goal in this regard is to progress the legislative proposal for a pan-European electronic ID, authentication and signature framework. This is a key enabler for a properly functioning EU digital market. The proposed regulation is technically complex and Ireland aims to comprehensively address the many important concerns raised by Member States during its Presidency with a view to producing a comprehensive Progress Report for Council next June.

In tandem with this initiative, Ireland has prioritised the delivery of measures to enhance trust in online services. Trust and security in online transactions is essential so that both consumers and businesses can make secure, simple and inexpensive online transactions. As Presidency, Ireland is therefore seeking to deliver real progress on the recently published proposals for a comprehensive EU Cyber Security Strategy as well as legislation relating to network and information security.

These cyber security proposals will build on earlier initiatives to enhance trust and security. Earlier this month, the Irish Presidency negotiated the first agreement under the Irish Presidency on a renewed mandate for the workings of the European Network and Information Security Agency (ENISA).

The rollout of advanced high speed broadband is a key priority across Europe and another important pillar of the Digital Agenda for Europe. In Ireland, we have published a National Broadband Plan which aims to deliver early on some of the key targets under the Digital Agenda for Europe. As Presidency we await with interest, proposals from the Commission in relation to reducing the cost of high speed broadband rollout which we believe will resonate with some of the actions identified in Ireland's National Broadband Plan, and on which we hope to commence dialogue during our Presidency.

All of these initiatives are designed to improve and encourage access for citizens, communities and business, thus enabling a more digitally empowered society and creating opportunities for growth. The proposed Directive on the Re-use of Public Sector Information, is aimed at creating such opportunities and Ireland hopes to shortly conclude an agreement with the European Parliament on this issue. The Directive allows for increased availability of public sector information which can be re-used for commercial and non-commercial purposes.

Making information more widely accessible across society is also a key objective and under Ireland's Presidency, the Council has started examining legislative proposals on the accessibility of public sector websites.

The recent MFF negotiations significantly impacted on the financial envelope available to the telecoms element of the Connecting Europe Facility. The telecoms Working Party will consider the most appropriate way forward on this initiative once the vote of the European Parliament on the budget is known.

Finally, the Digital Agenda Assembly will be held in Dublin next June. My officials are working closely with the Commission to shape the event which will emphasise digital skills and entrepreneurship. The theme of the event will be heavily influenced by the recently published mid-term review of the Digital Agenda which highlighted the fact that ICT can contribute to a paradigm shift in society and economic activity through more efficiency, new products and services and smarter public services.

Departmental Agencies Staff Remuneration

406. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will provide details of the payment of bonuses or other performance related payments and or allowances made to the staff of agencies under the aegis of his Department with a yearly breakdown from 2008 outlining the overall amount paid in each year period and the number of staff that received such payments and or allowances. [10161/13]

407. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will provide details of payments made to the CEO or equivalent of all agencies under the aegis of his Department including details of any bonuses, pension entitlements or any other remuneration paid to him or her in 2012. [10178/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): I propose to take Questions Nos. 406 and 407 together.

I wish to advise the Deputy that the information sought regarding payments made to CEOs and staff in the agencies under the aegis of my Department is an operational matter for each Agency.

All directions issued by the Government in relation to remuneration of CEOs in Semi State Companies have been brought to the attention of the relevant State Companies.

In so far as the Deputy's question relates to staff subordinate to the CEO, these are matters solely for the agency in question.

Radio Broadcasting Issues

408. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources his plans to deal with the following situation, seven out of ten minutes of listening time in Ireland is given to the 34 private radio stations here and at the same time taxpayer's money only goes to our national broadcasters, the JNLR figures show that 2.5 million listeners listen to independent radio stations whereas 1.2 million listen to our national stations, the action he will take to deal with this anomaly; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10262/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): As I have stated previously in this House, I fully recognise the contribution of the independent radio sector in bringing diversity to the airwaves, and serving the needs of communities, often at a very local level. However, it should be borne in mind that these stations were founded as commercial operations, with the profit motive as their primary objective.

Station owners sought and accepted licences on clear terms; terms which included a limited amount of 'public service' type content. Moreover, in many cases, their success in the licence application process was assisted by the voluntary commitments they gave in regard to the provision of public service type content, over and above that required by the relevant legislation. The licences were accepted in full knowledge of the current system of public funding. The fact that some of these stations are now undergoing an understandable degree of financial stress does not mean that the State should immediately step in and provide funding – they are and remain commercial enterprises.

Moreover, it should also be noted that their very popularity in the communities they serve is, in many cases, as a distinct result of the local news content and current affairs type programming that they provide and which, in turn, gives them a strong advertising presence and thus earning potential.

The rationale for providing State funding for the Public Service Broadcasters is to provide an independent and reliable income flow that allows these corporations to attain their public service objects while ensuring they can maintain editorial independence. This is especially important in the context of news and current affairs.

The overall aim of Public Service Broadcasting is to provide services and content which cater for all interests in society, while ensuring that the varied elements of Irish culture and its intrinsic values are protected. Through the obligations placed on the Public Service Broadcasters, which are established in legislation passed by the Oireachtas, and the criteria set for the funding of content through the Sound & Vision Scheme, the production of quality indigenous programming and the production of minority interest programming is strongly promoted.

I am, of course, willing to consider proposals from other broadcasting organisations in relation to the future distribution of funding. However, I have to be convinced that the distribution of public funds to independent commercial broadcasters represents a sound proposition in terms of policy for the sector.

Also, I would like to clarify that, even if I were minded to provide public monies to private investors, as the Deputy seems to be suggesting, EU State Aid rules very definitely apply.

It is categorically not possible for the State to simply decide to fund a set of incumbent licence holders during a licence period. Such a move, quite apart from the reaction of the European authorities, would expose the State to the risk of prosecution from other operators who may have considered applying for a licence were the revenue stream available.

The Deputy may wish to note that the Programme for Government commits to review the funding of independent broadcasters to ensure a healthy broadcasting environment in Ireland and work is ongoing in this regard. In line with its legislative obligations, the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI) is currently undertaking a review of the adequacy or otherwise of the public funding provided to the public service broadcasters. In this context, I have asked the BAI to consider as part of this review the potential impacts to these broadcasters if television licence receipts were further distributed to the independent broadcasting sector.

Broadband Services Provision

409. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the reason his Department's website is misleading in relation to the delivering of broadband to certain parts of County Longford, as it states that broadband is available in areas where in fact, it is not; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10267/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): In terms of telecommunications policy, my Department plays a key role in providing a supportive legislative and regulatory environment within which competition can flourish and private sector investment can take place. The Government has undertaken a number of initiatives to bring broadband to those parts of the country where operators have been unable to offer services on a commercial basis. In this connection, my Department provides a range of information on its website in relation to the provision of broadband

Ireland's telecommunications market has been liberalised since 1999 and since then has developed into a well-regulated market, supporting a multiplicity of commercial operators, providing services over a diverse range of technology platforms. Details of broadband services available on a County-by-County basis can be found on the website of the Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg) at www.callcosts.ie.

The State only becomes involved in the provision of services in instances of clear market failure, such as in the case of the National Broadband Scheme (NBS) and the Rural Broadband Scheme (RBS). Prior to the commencement of the National Broadband Scheme (NBS) a detailed mapping exercise was carried out to determine those areas that would be included in the Scheme and those which, by virtue of being already substantially served by existing broadband suppliers, could not be included. Under EU State aid and competition rules, the NBS is restricted to providing a basic service and is prohibited from providing a service in served areas where to do so would give rise to an unacceptable level of market distortion. In County Longford, NBS services are available within 11 of its 55 Electoral Divisions, details of which can be found are on my Department's website at http://www.dcenr.gov.ie/NR/rdonlyres/67F5C8D1-CFEB-4C0B-BC61-C9C2C0927AD0/0/Longford.pdf.

The Rural Broadband Scheme (RBS) was launched in 2011 in recognition of the fact that despite the widespread availability of broadband throughout Ireland, there still remained individual premises that were unable to receive broadband provision. This Scheme, which is now closed, was aimed at making a basic broadband service available to un-served premises in rural areas, not already covered by the NBS. Commercial service providers were in a position to offer services to all applicants from County Longford under the Scheme who agreed to engage with them. Relevant details in relation to County Longford can be found on my Department's website at the following link

http://www.dcenr.gov.ie/Communications/Communications+Development/Rural+Broadband+Scheme/Rural+Broadband+Scheme.htm.

In addition to consumer services, a State-funded Metropolitan Area Network, which provides high capacity fibre connectivity for businesses and telecoms operators in the region, is located in Longford town. Under the 100Mbps broadband to post-primary schools project, which is jointly funded by my Department and the Department of Education and Skills (DES), the nine second level schools in County Longford have been connected.

The Government's National Broadband Plan, which I published in August last, aims to radically change the broadband landscape in Ireland by ensuring that high speed services of at least 30Mbps are available to all of our citizens and businesses, well in advance of the EU's target date of 2020, and that significantly higher speeds are available to as many homes and businesses as possible. Ireland is now therefore moving to a new phase of public and private sector investment in broadband in Ireland which will see significantly improved speeds delivered across the country.

The National Broadband Plan commits the Government to investing in areas where high speed services are not commercially viable and will not be provided by the market. This will ensure that citizens or businesses, wherever they are located, have a broadband connection which meets their needs to interact effectively with society and business in a global digital environment.

I would reiterate that the Government remains committed to the delivery of the speeds referred to in the Plan, to ensure that all parts of Ireland, including County Longford, will have at least 30Mbps connectivity.

Energy Prices

410. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the extent to which directly or in consultation with the regulator, he and or

his Department continues to monitor the prices charged by oil companies for petrol and diesel; if the current prices charged reflect a reduction in accordance with the fall in oil prices on world markets over the past four years; if any reason has been given for relatively high prices now being charged at filling stations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10329/13]

411. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if any discussions have taken place, directly or at EU level, with a view to ensuring that oil price reductions on world markets are passed on to the consumer with particular reference to the need to lower energy costs, as a prelude to economic recovery; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10330/13]

412. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the extent to which comparisons have been made between energy prices here and those applicable in Europe and worldwide with a view to ensuring that the domestic and industrial consumer here can avail of lower international oil prices; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10331/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): I propose to take Questions Nos. 410 to 412, inclusive, together.

Neither I nor the Commission for Energy Regulation have a statutory function in the monitoring or regulation of petrol and diesel prices.

The Irish oil industry is fully privatised, liberalised and de-regulated and there is free entry to the market. There is no price control and it is Government policy to encourage price competition and consumer choice.

The upward trend in petrol and diesel prices arises primarily from increases in international commodity prices over which Ireland has no control. For example, the benchmark spot price of a barrel of Brent Crude Oil has risen from an average of US$43 in February 2009 to an average of US$117 in February 2013. This has inevitably resulted in an increase in retail petrol and diesel prices.

Previous surveys have shown that prices charged by Irish retailers for oil products relate to the refinery price rather than to the price of crude oil. Prices at the pump reflect volatile market prices, transportation costs, trends in euro/dollar exchange rates and other operating costs, together with the impact of taxation on oil products.

The EU Market Observatory publishes an Oil Bulletin with current and historical oil product prices for all EU countries.

As of February 11th 2013, the price of petrol in Ireland was marginally below the EU average; while the price of diesel was 4.8% higher than the EU average.

If duties and taxes are stripped out then the price of petrol in Ireland was 98.5% of the EU average; and the price of diesel was less than 1% higher than the EU average.

Ireland's concerns about high oil prices are shared at EU level and fellow Member Countries of the International Energy Agency (IEA). The EU and IEA agree that high fossil fuel prices, which pose a threat to economic recovery, underline the need to reduce dependence on fossil fuels by radically enhanced energy efficiency measures and the development of renewable energy.

The Biofuel Obligation Scheme incentivises and enables the sustainable growth of an Irish biofuels market. The Scheme currently requires that the amount of biofuel brought to the mar-

ket is not less than 6.38% of petroleum road transport fuels. In 2011 some 145 million litres of biofuel were brought to the Irish market.

The development of electric vehicles offers potential for Ireland to use cheaper grid sourced electricity, an increasing amount of which is sourced from renewable resources.

These opportunities will progressively reduce our dependence on imported fossil fuels for transport, while supporting energy competitiveness and security.

Broadband Services Provision

413. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the extent to which standard, quality and speed of broadband here currently compares with the best available worldwide; his plans to maximise this country's position in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10332/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): There has been significant growth in the take up of broadband services and contracted speeds in Ireland in recent years. The most recent telecommunications data report by the Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg), reveals that the number of broadband subscribers has more than doubled to over 1.6 million between 2007 and 2012. Similarly, in the case of speeds, the number of residential customers contracted in a range between 2 – 10 Mbps increased from 41% of all subscribers in 2007 to 71% in 2012. The number of subscribers accessing speeds exceeding 10 Mbps increased from 0.2% to 24%.

EU and international comparisons of broadband services are complex to measure and interpret. For example, OECD surveys calculate an average of all advertised broadband speeds. The average speed reduces if there is a significant choice of products advertised at these lower speeds. In addition OECD calculations do not differentiate between services that are available nationally and services which are available in selected areas. Similarly, EU Commission statistics published on its digital scoreboard website, compare advertised versus actual speeds and are based on 2011 data. Comparisons between countries do not take account of distinct geographical and demographic challenges that face countries such as Ireland where the population is highly dispersed.

EU Commission statistics, published on its digital scoreboard website, which compare advertised broadband speeds across the EU notes that 84% of subscribers in Ireland access speeds in a range between 2-10 Mbps compared to the EU average of 87% in this range. In the case of speeds at or exceeding 10 Mbps, the EU Commission reports 29% availability over fixed lines in Ireland compared to an EU average of 48%. In the most recently available OECD data, Ireland's penetration is ranked 13th in terms of wireless connections and 25th in terms of fixed line connections. The average speed reported by OECD for Ireland is 23 Mbps compared to an OECD average closer to 45 Mbps. Other international studies rank Ireland well in terms of actual speeds experienced by users.

The more recent ComReg report notes an overall trend of customers contracting at higher speeds. The proportion of customers contracting at or below 2 Mbps fell from 7% to 5% of all subscriptions between 2011 and 2012. Increasingly, subscribers are contracting at speeds in excess of 10Mbps.

Recent market developments are dramatically changing the landscape of high speed broadband provision in Ireland. During the preparation of Ireland's National Broadband Plan, the commercial market operators indicated that they expect to provide 70Mbps to 100Mbps ser-

vices to 50% of the population by 2015. The commercial sector is already committed to investments of the order of some €1bn and is accelerating its investment to deliver broadband speeds of 30Mbps to 150Mbps to homes and businesses. For example:

- Eircom is currently investing up to €500m in a phased deployment of fibre to the cabinet infrastructure, which is planned to make high-speed broadband available to some 1.2m premises. The network has already reached more than 230,000 premises and is expected to be launched over the coming months;

- UPC is investing €500m in its cable and fibre network, which is delivering speeds of up to 150Mbps. UPC aims to have this service available to 700,000 homes by 2015;

- Mobile telecommunications operators will be rolling out advanced mobile broadband products in 2013, following the recent multi-band spectrum auction.

The National Broadband Plan commits the Government to investing in areas where high speed services are not commercially viable and will not be provided by the market. My Department is making preparations to commence a formal national mapping exercise to inform the level of Government interaction that may be required and the areas that need to be targeted for a State-led investment. It will also form a critical input to an EU State Aid application in respect of any State-led intervention.

This will ensure that citizens or businesses, wherever they are located, have a broadband connection which meets their needs to interact effectively with society and business.

Mobile Telephony

414. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the extent to which mobile phone technology and quality of service here compares with the best available throughout Europe and worldwide; if it is possible to encourage the service providers to take any particular initiative to improve and upgrade the service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10333/13]

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

Section 11 of the Act, requires that "Subject to this Act, the Commission shall be independent in the exercise of its functions" and such independence is also a requirement under the EU Directives which underpin the electronic communications regulatory framework in all Member States.

In late 2012 ComReg concluded a process to allocate access to radio spectrum suitable for use in the provision of mobile telephone services, including the current fourth generation "4G" standard technology. The "4G" technology is the most modern currently available to support mobile phone services, which the successful applicants are expected to commence rolling out later this year. It is a matter for ComReg to monitor compliance by the successful applicants with the terms and conditions of the spectrum allocation process.

Offshore Exploration

415. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the total number of oil, gas or drilling explorations that have taken place on and offshore in each of the past ten years to date; the number of commercially viable discoveries in that period; the extent to which modern technology is likely to facilitate a higher rate of viable explorations in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10334/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Fergus O'Dowd): No oil or gas explorations/appraisal drilling onshore in Ireland has taken place in the last ten years. A total of fifteen explorations/appraisal wells were drilled in the Irish offshore since 2003, a breakdown per year is set out in the table hereunder.

There has been six discoveries of both oil and gas since 2003, however none have been declared commercial to date.

While there have been incremental advances in exploration technology in recent years, an increase in the level of exploration drilling is required if Ireland's petroleum potential is to be realised.

Year	Number of wells drilled
2003	1
2004	1
2005	0
2006	3
2007	3
2008	4
2009	1
2010	1
2011	1
2012	0
2013 (to date)	0

Energy Prices

416. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the extent, if any, to which procurement at EU level can be beneficial in the context of energy price reduction; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10335/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): The Government is most concerned at the impact of higher energy prices on residential and commercial consumers. It is the case however, that Ireland in the main, is at the mercy of international fossil fuel prices which dictate the retail price of electricity and gas, which is the key factor in the retail price of both electricity and gas. In particular, Ireland is a price taker for gas. Global gas and oil prices have risen sharply since the start of 2011 driven by events in the Middle East, North Africa and Japan and demand from emerging economies of China and India. There are clear indications that international oil and gas prices will rise further over the coming months. The Government remains firmly committed to increasing competition as the best means of exerting downward pressure on energy prices, and also towards ensuring diversity of energy supply to reduce our exposure to high and volatile external energy prices. This dependence on imported gas also underlines the need to promote and invest in renewable energy and energy efficiency.

Effective procurement of energy services can also lead to significant organisational savings. My Department is working closely with private and public stakeholders on a National Energy Performance Contracting Policy Framework (the Framework) to help companies procure energy-related services including energy efficiency retrofits, energy supply and behavioural improvements. Recent experience from programmes run by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland demonstrates the substantial monetary benefits that good procurement can deliver. I expect to be in a position to publish the draft Framework within the next two months.

Ireland's demand for gas is met almost entirely by imports across the gas interconnectors from Great Britain. The vast bulk of UK gas demand is currently being met by indigenous North Sea production and imports from Norway. Through the gas interconnectors Ireland has access to diverse sources of supply including UK indigenous production, Norwegian production and physical interconnection with mainland Europe. It is prudent, in light of Ireland's dependence on gas imported from the UK, to work to reduce our reliance on this source. Bringing Corrib gas production on stream will further reduce our reliance on imports.

The European Commission recognises that Europe needs an internal energy market that is competitive and integrated with electricity and gas flowing where and when it is needed. The EU aims to fully integrate national energy markets to give consumers and businesses more and better products and services, more competition, and more secure supplies. In this regard I welcome the recent progress made on the SEM Market Integration Project, within the context that implementing the European Target Model is a positive development that will bring significant benefits to the consumers and producers of electricity on the island of Ireland. Of course actual physical cross border trading of electricity is only possibe to the extent that interconnectors can accommodate it and accordingly I welcome the recent completion of construction by EirGrid of the East West Interconnector (EWIC) a strategically vital infrastructure project.

I presided, last Friday, over the European Energy Council as part of Ireland's EU Presidency and among the issues on the agenda was the Commission Communication on completion of the Internal Energy Market. This work will feed into the preparation of concrete and operational Council Conclusions on the further steps necessary for completion of the Internal Energy Market which I am aiming to bring for adoption to the June Energy Council.

Renewable Energy Generation Issues

417. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will indicate to which unit cost in respect of electricity generation has been made with a view to identifying the most viable alternative electricity-generating sources; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10336/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): I assume the Deputy is referring to price support schemes for renewable energy generation. Ireland operates a number of support schemes for renewable generation known as REFIT. The REFIT schemes operate by providing a floor price for renewable electricity exported to the grid from specified technologies over a 15 year period.

The reference rates for the REFIT 1 and REFIT 2 scheme per megawatt hour are as follows:

Large Wind	€69.235
Small Wind	€71.664
Hydro	€87.455

Biomass LFG	€85.026
Other Biomass	€87.455

The reference rates for the REFIT 3 scheme per megawatt hour are as follows:

Biomass Combustion	€88.693
Biomass Combustion - Energy Crops	€99.127
Large Biomass Combined Heat and Power (CHP)	€125.213
Small Biomass CHP	€146.082
Large Anaerobic Digestion (AD) Non CHP	€104.344
Small AD Non CHP	€114.779
Large AD CHP	€135.647
Small AD CHP	€156.516

The first Progress Report on the National Renewable Energy Action Plan (NREAP), which is available on my Department's website, sets out the expected breakdown in renewable technologies in the meeting of our target.

It estimated that 3968MW of installed renewable capacity would be required in 2020 to reach 40% renewable electricity, provided our energy efficiency targets are met. Of that, 3,521MW is estimated to be met from onshore wind, 75MW from wave and tidal, 234MW of hydro generation and 274MW of biomass.

The First Progress Report on the NREAP also acknowledged that there had been some changes as regards technology compared to the published NREAP. This Plan indicated a particular expected breakdown in the trajectory between onshore and offshore wind. The Government has, however, decided since, that in meeting our legal obligation to deliver the 2020 renewables target, onshore rather than offshore wind should be pursued in the first instance, in order to minimise any support scheme costs borne by electricity consumers.

Wave and tidal energy are still at the RD&D stage of development.

As can be seen above, the lowest support scheme reference rates are those relating to onshore wind and onshore wind is expected to provide the greatest contribution towards achieving 40% renewable electricity by 2020.

Renewable Energy Generation Issues

418. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the proportion of electricity now generated through wind or alternative energy resources; the extent to which targets in this regard can be revised and updated with particular

reference to the need to reduce dependence on imports; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10339/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): Under Directive 2009/28/EC Ireland was set a target of 16% of all energy consumption to be from renewable sources by 2020, up from 3.1% in 2005. Each Member State was required to have at least 10% renewable transport consumption by 2020 and was required to produce a National Renewable Energy Action Plan (NREAP), setting out how the overall target would be achieved across the electricity, transport and heating sectors.

Ireland set out in its NREAP that it intended to reach its target by 40% renewable electricity, 10% renewable transport and 12% renewable heating, which together amount to 16% of overall energy consumption in 2020.

At the end of 2012, the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) estimates that almost 19% of electricity consumption was from renewable sources. The first progress report on the NREAP estimates that approximately 4000MW of installed renewable capacity is required in order to achieve our target. We need approximately 2100MW of additional new renewable capacity to be installed in the period to 2020 to achieve 40% renewable electricity.

This is a large amount of new generation and will be challenging to achieve. Significant new grid build and grid upgrade work is required in order to connect this large volume of new generation. In addition, significant operational changes are required to grid operation to ensure that the grid is capable of absorbing this significant amount of new intermittent asynchronous renewable generation while ensuring system security and stability.

While this will be challenging, EirGrid has launched a programme of work known as DS3 in order to manage the operational changes necessary to achieve 40% renewable electricity by 2020. This requires an ability for the system to securely cater for 75% instantaneous penetration of wind generation (i.e. that at least 75% of our electricity consumption can be from wind at times when wind is available). Currently the system limits this to 50% for operational and security reasons. Several operational and system changes are required to make this step change and it will be challenging, but work is underway to ensure that it is achievable.

There is still an enormous amount of work and effort required to ensure that Ireland achieves the challenging legally binding target assigned under Directive 2009/28/EC. There is no intention to revise this upwards in the current circumstances.

Social Media Regulation

419. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the extent if any to which communications technology can be utilised to prevent unwarranted, unwelcomed and uninvited electronic communication resulting in stalking or bullying; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10340/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): As the Deputy will be aware, Social Media are online platforms that allow people create, share and exchange information, and to comment amongst themselves in virtual communities and networks. To date, these media have not been subject to a formal regulatory regime akin to that used to 'regulate' traditional radio and television broadcast media, either in Ireland or in other jurisdictions. There is a range of reasons for this, not least the rapidly evolving nature of the technologies involved, the sensitivities around regulating media and the multi-jurisdictional nature of the Internet.

It is important to acknowledge the economic and social benefits that the widespread use of social media have brought to people, communities and to business. However, some of the issues that have arisen as a consequence of this bear consideration. These challenges include dealing with harassment and bullying online, as well as issues around defamation, data protection and even copyright.

There has been a very considerable amount of discussion on these matters in the recent past at EU and Council of Europe level, in which my Department has been involved. Indeed this matter is also the subject of a fundamental debate at EU and national level at present, a fact reflected by the recent decision of the Joint Oireachtas Committee to examine the issue.

As Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, I have policy responsibility for providing a supportive legislative and regulatory environment to facilitate the development of high quality communications infrastructure and services. However, I should highlight that I do not have sole responsibility for addressing as to how that infrastructure is used. Responsibility, in the context of abuse over the Internet in particular, also sits with the Minister for Justice and Equality, and the executive agency of his Department, the Office for Internet Safety.

It is clear that there are no simple answers to the challenges posed by the development and abuse of social media, not least because of the international basis of the services and because any possible policy responses fall across a range of Government Departments. In recognition of this complexity my Department maintains open and regular contact with all Departments and State Agencies with responsibilities in this area.

My Department also monitors international developments with a view to ensuring that domestic policy within its remit reflects best practice and that the regulatory framework is amended as necessary. In that regard, I look forward to the deliberations of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Transport and Communications, and I also look forward to meeting the Committee on this subject.

Postal Services

420. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the extent, if any, to which he continues to have contact with An Post with a view to ensuring the maintenance of the post office and services network and next day delivery throughout the country without exception; if alternative, complementary and or compatible services such as banking continue to be attracted by An Post with a view to ensuring its long term viability; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10341/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): Operational matters in relation to the post office network are a matter for the management and Board of An Post and one in which I have no statutory function.

As shareholder, however, I have a strong concern in relation to the ongoing commercial position of the Company and I regularly liaise with the Company in this regard.

An Post has many strengths and has the largest retail presence in the country. I have impressed on the Company the need to further exploit its unique position in this regard and have been supportive of its attempts to diversify its income streams and to win a wider range of commercial contracts offering higher margins.

I welcome the progress An Post has made towards diversification with its enhanced arrangement with AIB and its agreement with Aviva for the transfer of Aviva Ireland's branch offices

personal insurance business book to One Direct.

In the context of the public sector transformation agenda, I will continue to engage with my colleague the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform in relation to consideration, as appropriate, of the post office network for transactional elements of the business of Government Departments and Agencies, and have stressed to my Government colleagues that the network is ideally configured for over the counter transactions.

While I have overall responsibility for the postal sector, the Communications Regulation (Postal Services) Act 2011 charges the Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg), as the postal regulator, with the promotion of the development of the postal sector and particularly the availability of the universal postal service, the promotion of the interests of users and the facilitation of the development of competition in the sector. ComReg is in regular contact with my Department.

According to the Act, An Post is statutorily required, as the designated universal service provider, to provide a universal postal service. The essential element of this obligation is the collection and delivery of mail to every address in the State on every working day.

The universal service obligation ensures by way of regulatory obligations that a minimum set of services is provided at an affordable price for the benefit of all users, irrespective of their geographical location. It is a fundamental principle of the regulatory framework for postal services and is an explicit requirement of the EU Postal Services Directive which has provided for the gradual and controlled opening of the postal services market to competition.

Cloud Computing Issues

421. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the extent to which he envisages cloud computing to become of major, commercial impact in the context of economic recovery and job creation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10342/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): Cloud computing has the potential to revolutionise the IT investment model in Ireland and elsewhere. It allows companies to use the internet to efficiently access vast amounts of computing resources that would otherwise be beyond their reach. A report undertaken by A&L Goodbody and commissioned by Microsoft has suggested that Cloud Computing sales by Irish firms could be worth €9.5 billion per annum by 2014 and provide for 8,600 jobs as business migrates to the Cloud.

The Programme for Government commits to a range of initiatives aimed at making Ireland a leader in the emerging I.T. market of cloud computing. My colleague, the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, Richard Bruton, T.D., has established a group to implement this commitment on Cloud Computing. The group, on which my Department is represented, has been tasked with addressing all aspects of cloud computing, including expenditure, IT, procurement, security, infrastructure, and industrial strategy.

I understand that the group submitted its report to Minister Bruton in June 2012 and, over the period July to December 2012, assisted in drafting a series of specific follow up actions which have now been included in the 2013 Action Plan for Jobs.

Gas Exploration Licences

422. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will indicate the continuing progress in the development of the Corrib gas field with particular reference to the likelihood of supply becoming available to the domestic and industrial consumer within the coming months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10362/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): Completion of the Corrib gas field development works by the developer is the principal factor that will determine the date for first gas. Pending such completion, it is not possible to state a date for when gas from the Corrib gas field will become available.

It is estimated that construction of the onshore section of the pipeline, which began last year, including the construction of a 5km tunnel, will take in the region of three years. First gas cannot therefore reasonably be anticipated before end 2014.

EU Directives

423. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide an update on Ireland's initial assessment under the marine strategy framework directive; if the atlas of the Irish marine environment which was being developed as part of the assessment has been completed; if so, if he will make this information accessible; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9806/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): The Marine Strategy Framework Directive aims to achieve good environmental status of the marine waters of the European Union by 2020 and to protect the resource base upon which marine-related economic and social activities depend. The Marine Institute, the national agency with responsibility for marine research and development, is assisting my Department in managing the implementation of the Directive.

The first stage in implementing the Directive involves an initial assessment of marine waters, the determination of good environmental status and the establishment of environmental targets and associated indicators. An atlas of the marine environment, which is essentially a repository of the data accumulated for the assessment, is also being compiled. Work commenced on the first stage in February 2012 and is currently being finalised. When this work is completed and reported to the European Commission, the various reports will also be available to the public for information and comment.

As part of the preparation for wider public participation, a document entitled Ireland's Marine Strategy Framework Directive – Implementation was published on my Department's website in December 2012. The publication is designed to build a greater awareness of the Directive and a dedicated e-mail address has been set up to facilitate comment from interested parties.

Commercial Rates Issues

424. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans to instruct local authorities to reduce commercial rates for struggling businesses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9917/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): Local authorities are under a statutory obligation to levy rates on any property used for

commercial purposes in accordance with the details entered in the valuation lists prepared by the independent Commissioner of Valuation under the Valuation Act 2001.

The levying and collection of rates are matters for each individual local authority. The annual rate on valuation (ARV), which is applied to the valuation for each property determined by the Valuation Office to obtain the amount payable in rates, is decided by the elected members of each local authority in the annual budget and its determination is a reserved function.

However, in recent years local authorities have been urged by my Department to exercise restraint or, where possible, to reduce commercial rates. Local authorities have responded well to such requests. The latest available figures indicate that ARVs for 2013 have decreased nationwide on average by 0.33% compared to 2012. This follows a similar decrease of 0.31% in 2012, 0.64% in 2011 and 0.62% in 2010.

I recognise that these are difficult economic times for many businesses and I am continuing to keep all matters relating to rates under regular consideration in my Department.

Nitrates Action Programme Review

425. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government when it is expected that the review of the nitrates action plan will be concluded; if consideration will be given to the recent problems associated with weather and difficulties that farmers have encountered as a result; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9938/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): A review of Ireland's Nitrates Action Programme will be carried out this year. I will work closely with my colleague the nister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine in conducting this review, which will be informed by expert views and developments in environmental and agricultural research. In addition, the review will be subject to full public consultation in which all interested stakeholders can participate. Careful consideration will be given to all submissions received.

Public consultation for the review of the Programme will commence in the second quarter of 2013 with a view to concluding the process by the end of the year.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

426. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the extent to which carbon reduction targets are likely to be met in accordance with international agreements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10337/13]

427. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the extent to which each European country continues to meet its targets in respect of carbon reduction; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10338/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 426 and 427 together.

I refer to the replies to Questions Nos. 258 of 14 February 2013 and 514 of 19 February 2013. Within the EU, compliance on an individual Member State basis is a matter for the Government of each Member State.

Rental Accommodation Scheme Expenditure

428. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the total cost of the rental accommodation scheme for the years 2011 and 2012 respectively; and the projected cost for 2013. [10486/13]

469. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the amount of money that has been spent on the rental accommodation scheme and rental schemes over the past five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10294/13]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 428 and 469 together.

Since 2008 and up to the end of December 2012 expenditure on the Rental Accommodation Scheme [RAS] came to just over €477 million. Since the scheme commenced in 2005 expenditure has totalled €512.3 million. This following table sets out the annual expenditure from 2008 to 2012:

RAS expenditure 2008-2012

Year	€
2008	€53,025,430
2009	€83,394,513
2010	€100,076,430
2011	€115,917,365
2012	€125,429,966
Total	€477,843,704

€150m has been allocated for the Rental Accommodation Scheme in 2013.

Building Regulations Amendments

429. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the position regarding concerns at the proposed changes to the Building Control Bill; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9550/13]

430. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will defer signing the new Building Control (Amendment) Regulations 2012 until the report from the environment committee is published; if he will give due consideration to the alliance paper (details supplied) and non-registered architects' concerns over the pending legislation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9551/13]

434. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the position regarding concerns at the proposed changes to the Building Control (Amendment) Regulations 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9661/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 429, 430 and 434 together.

I am currently finalising the Building Control Amendment Regulations 2013 for signature into law following a comprehensive public consultation process undertaken in 2012. Persons who are on the registers of Architects and Building Surveyors established in accordance with

the Building Control Act 2007 or who are Chartered Engineers may sign the statutory certificates of compliance for designers and for assigned certifiers that will be introduced under the new regulations. Depending on their background and experience, members of the Architects Alliance may qualify for consideration for inclusion on the register of Architects or on the register of Building Surveyors which, as indicated, would also enable them to sign the statutory certificates being introduced under the new regulations. The new regulations will provide for a transition period of 12 months which will, among other things, give sufficient time for eligible persons who have not already done so to apply for registration. The transition period will also provide for a smooth transition to the new requirements in terms of projects currently on site.

The arrangements for the registration of Architects and Building Surveyors under t he Building Control Act 2007 are open, transparent and fair for potential candidates from a variety of backgrounds including those who are practically trained and have limited or no academic training or qualifications. I am satisfied that the statutory arrangements for registration that are currently in place are appropriate and I have no proposals to amend the Act presently.

I understand that the Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Environment, Arts and Culture has recently been giving some consideration to the arrangements that are in place for the registration of practically trained architects under the Act of 2007. I look forward to considering the Committee's conclusions and recommendations in due course. My own view as outlined above is that the existing statutory position is fair and reasonable but that it may be opportune at this point to consider what practical steps can be taken to facilitate and support practically trained people who are interested in doing so to pursue the opportunities for registration that are open to them under the Act.

I have asked my Department, in conjunction with the RIAI as registration body for the Register of Architects, to meet with members of the Architects Alliance to discuss further the concerns raised in the correspondence supplied.

Water Charges Introduction

431. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 259 of 14 February 2013, his views on the principle that householders should get a basic free allowance of water and that charges should only apply for usage above that allowance.; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9583/13]

447. **Deputy Paul J. Connaughton** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans for the way Irish Water will charge for water for households; if consideration will be given to households with multiple occupants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10029/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 431 and 447 together.

I refer to the reply to Question No. 259 of 14 February 2013 which set out the Government's proposed approach to domestic water charges. No decision has yet been taken on the level of, or approach to, the free allowance.

Priory Hall Development

432. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government when he expects the resolution process for the residents of Priory Hall, Dublin to conclude; if he has set a resolution date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9639/13]

474. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide an update on support for the Priory Hall, Dublin, residents. [10423/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 432 and 474 together.

Dublin City Council is the designated authority with powers to enforce the statutory requirements arising under the Fire Safety Act, the Building Control Acts and the Planning and Development Acts, all of which are at issue in relation to Priory Hall. The Council is also the designated Housing Authority under the Housing Acts. I am aware of the significant efforts that have been made by the Council to provide for the needs of residents to date and I understand that the Council will continue to work proactively on behalf of the residents towards achieving the much needed resolution of the issues at Priory Hall.

The resolution process, which I understand is on-going , arose in the context of legal proceedings which were adjourned to afford relevant parties the opportunity to work together, under the chairmanship of Mr. Justice Finnegan (retired President of the High Court), to identify a way forward in relation to the complex problems at Priory Hall. Given that the matter is before the courts, it would be inappropriate for me to comment further other than to continue to urge all concerned to afford Mr. Justice Finnegan the opportunity to complete the task which he is undertaking.

Disadvantaged Status

433. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the special protection or regeneration status that exists for deprived areas; the criteria that would be considered for an area to qualify for any such status; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9654/13]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): My Department's National Regeneration Programme targets the country's most disadvantaged communities; those defined by the most extreme social exclusion, unemployment and anti-social behaviour. Regeneration seeks to rebuild these communities by addressing not just the physical environment in which they live but also by investing in the social and economic life of the areas.

My Department currently supports an ambitious programme of regeneration projects, including large-scale projects like Limerick City, Ballymun and the former PPP projects in Dublin City and smaller scale projects in Cork City, Tralee, Sligo and Dundalk.

Responsibility for the compilation of regeneration proposals rests with the relevant local authority. Regeneration seeks to create sustainable communities through a combination of social, educational and economic initiatives and also by rejuvenating the built environment through a combination of demolition, construction and refurbishment of dwellings , having regard to urban design guidelines. Local authorities are required to adopt a holistic and strategic approach involving multiple local and national agencies in an integrated scheme designed to create sustainable communities and to address the underlying causes of deprivation in the area. There is a

requirement for regeneration projects to deliver more than just an improvement in the housing standards of an area but to take a broader approach to addressing the socio-economic and infrastructure deficits that contribute to social exclusion and disadvantage.

Question No. 434 answered with Question No. 429

Fire Service Staff

435. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans to reduce the number of chief fire officers and assistant chief fire officers in the various fire services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9662/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): The recently published "Keeping Communities Safe" (KCS) , which I have adopted as national policy, sets the future direction of fire services in Ireland. The national standards proposed in KCS are in keeping with international good practice and are crucial to the achievement of a consistent approach to the provision of effective fire services across fire services in Ireland. KCS also indicates a move to a "shared services" structure, involving a reduction in the number of service delivery units from 30 to 21 .

The local authority fire services annual budget of €250 million and the 3,233 fire-fighters who provide the services are currently managed by the 29 Chief Fire Officers . Following implementation of KCS, in a new configuration of 21 service delivery units, there will be 21 Chief Fire Officer positions .

At the most recent count in 2012 , there are 203 senior fire officers (including the 29 Chief Fire Officers) who provide and manage the delivery of fire services from 220 fire stations, using a fleet of some 500 vehicles. Staffing in the fire services is covered by the local government Employment Control Framework for the sector . Firefighter numbers have been protected from the recruitment embargo and have not changed since 2008, while senior officer numbers have decreased from 270 to 203 in the same period. This 25% decrease of officer numbers is in line with overall local authority staffing decreases.

Unfinished Housing Developments

436. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government , further to Parliamentary Question No. 456 of 12 February 2013, the reason an estate in south Tipperary which had been classed in category three unfinished estates by South Tipperary County Council in 2011 has not been included in his Departments list of unfinished estates for household charge purposes; if his Department has received requests from South Tipperary County Council to correct the omission of this estate (details supplied); if he will have this estate included in the list; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9671/13]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): As part of the process of preparing the National Housing Development Survey 2011, published by my Department in October 2011, local authorities , including South Tipperary County Council, provided details of all unfinished housing developments in their areas. Unfinished housing developments were divided into four categories as follows: Category one, where the development is still being actively completed by the devel-

oper, or where no serious public safety issues exist; Category two, where a receiver has been appointed; Category three, where a receiver has not been appointed and the developer is still in place but effectively inactive; and Category four, where the development has been effectively abandoned and is posing serious problems for residents.

This categorisation formed the basis for the list of those unfinished developments eligible for a waiver on the annual household charge. Only households in developments in categories three and four are eligible for the waiver from payment of the household charge. The list of developments in which households are eligible for the waiver in 2012 is set out under the Local Government (Household Charge) Regulations 2012.

While Longfield Park, Boherlahan, was classified as category three by the local authority when identifying unfinished estates as part of the 2011 National Housing Development Survey, it was omitted, in error, from the list of estates prescribed as qualifying for a waiver from the household charge 2012. There is no appeals procedure and no facility to amend the list once it has been prescribed. Consideration of the categorisation of this development will again arise in the context of the prescribed list for purposes of the waiver from the local property tax.

United Nations Environmental Programme

437. **Deputy Jerry Buttimer** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will report on the 27th session of the UN Environment Programme Governing Council recently held in Kenya; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9676/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): The 27th session of UNEP's Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum took place in Nairobi from 18 February to 22 February. This was a historic meeting as it marked the first under new universal membership arrangements for UNEP agreed in "The Future We Want" document at the Rio +20 Conference held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in June 2012. Environment Ministers attending the Session backed decisions designed to ensure a strengthened and upgraded institution that will be able to meet the environmental challenges of the 21st century. This was the first major restructuring of UNEP since it was founded four decades ago. The negotiations in Nairobi were challenging, particularly in relation to the new institutional arrangements and it fell to the Irish Presidency to coordinate the EU's input to these negotiations.

The Irish Presidency team's co-ordination role involved managing multiple parallel tracks of meetings and participating in a number of bi-lateral meetings with other non-EU delegations during the Session. Following agreement on all the major decisions tabled, the Irish Presidency on behalf of the EU and its Member States welcomed the outcome of the Session.

The Ministerial segment took place over the first three days of the Session during which I and fellow Ministers discussed a range of issues including the key priority of Institutional Reform of UNEP, Sustainable Development Goals, and the Green Economy. In addition, the Governing Council took a number of other decisions across a range of themes including on sustainable consumption and production, green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication, chemicals and waste and UNEP's Programme of Work and Budget. Further details on the negotiations and outcomes of the meeting are available at *http://www.unep.org*. On the eve of the Governing Council I addressed a High Level international meeting on the Rule of Law and the Environment which brought together Ministers of the Environment and Government representatives with representatives of the judicial, legal and auditing professions.

I attended and spoke at round table discussions on emerging policy issues in the area of the environment and also attended lunchtime discussions, hosted by the Executive Director of UNEP, Mr. Achim Steiner, on the Green Economy. I also outlined, in my Presidency role, key EU priorities and concerns on the institutional arrangements for UNEP being discussed at the Session. In addition, I attended and spoke on behalf of the EU at a Ministerial Breakfast hosted by the German Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety, for key players in the negotiations. I also attended a reception hosted by the Head of the EU delegation in Nairobi at which Sustainable Development Goals were discussed.

While at the Governing Council I also took the opportunity to have a number of bilateral meetings. I met with the Executive Director of UNEP to discuss a number of issues including the key issues before the Session, Ireland's Presidency of the EU in the context of the Informal Environment Council which takes place in Dublin on 22/23 April next and issues relating to the GEMS Water Programme, which is the primary source for global water quality data and information. I had further discussions on this latter issue with UNEP at official level.

I also met with Mr. Richard Beynon, the UK Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Natural Environment, Water and Rural Affairs, during which we discussed priorities for Ireland's Presidency of the EU. I also met with Mr. Janez Potocnik, EU Commissioner for the Environment, to review EU priorities and the state of play in negotiations during the Governing Council and co-chaired, with Commissioner Potocnik, a meeting with representatives of major groups and civil society. During the negotiations, I also chaired two meetings of EU Ministers and Heads of Delegations to agree EU priorities as discussions moved into a critical phase. Commissioner Potocnik and I also took the opportunity to meet, on a bilateral basis, with Environment Ministers from a number of Latin American countries - Columbia, Mexico, Bolivia and Brazil - to discuss key issues during the Session, principally in relation to sustainable development goals, the green economy and resource efficiency.

In the margins of the Governing Council, and in accordance with normal practice, I attended a reception hosted by Ireland's Honorary Consul at which I met members of the Irish Community in Kenya and Irish officials from UNEP involved in preparations for the 27th session.

Control of Dogs

438. **Deputy Nicky McFadden** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide an update on recent contact with farming representatives regarding the promotion of responsible dog ownership, particularly in order to reduce the level of sheep worrying taking place in rural areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9693/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): Both I and my Department met recently with representatives of the Irish Farming Association as part of on-going discussions regarding dog control issues in general and instances of sheep worrying in particular.

As a direct result of these discussions both my Department and the Irish Farmers Association issued press releases regarding the spate of serious dog attacks on sheep which occurred earlier in the year. I stressed the need for owners to take responsibility for their dogs, as this is the most effective way of ensuring that such attacks are avoided. These comments received significant nationwide media coverage.

My Department is joining with the Irish Farmers Association in the development of a local

radio advertising campaign to highlight the issue of dog attacks on sheep. I expect this to air shortly to coincide with the main lambing season.

I will continue to work with the IFA and other responsible stakeholders on our shared aim of promoting responsible dog ownership and to reinforce the message that dogs should never be allowed to roam alone, especially at night and most especially during the lambing season.

Architectural Qualifications

439. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans to introduce a provision for a grandfather clause under the Building Control Act and its regulations to ensure that persons with experience and a long standing reputation in the business may continue to operate as architects and use that title; and in particular that they will be qualified to provide building certification services under the Act; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9706/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): Part 3 of the Building Control Act 2007 sets out the statutory arrangements for the registration of persons legally entitled to use the title of Architect. Section 22 of the Act already provides for the continued operation, as architects, of experienced persons by means of a technical assessment process which is open to individuals who had been performing duties commensurate with those of an architect for a period of ten years or more prior to the commencement of the Act. Eight persons have to date successfully qualified for inclusion on the register of architects by means of the technical assessment process. I am satisfied that the statutory arrangements for registration that are currently in place are appropriate, open and transparent and I have no plans to change these arrangements at present. In relation to practically trained architects in particular, it is clear that the technical assessment process is a viable route to registration and I look forward to seeing more persons avail of this opportunity in time. I have asked my Department to work in conjunction with the registration body to see if any practical steps can be taken to facilitate and support the relatively small number of practically trained persons who are interested in and eligible to pursue registration by means of technical assessment.

I am currently finalising the Building Control Amendment Regulations 2013 for signature into law following a comprehensive public consultation process undertaken in 2012. Persons who are on the registers of Architects and Building Surveyors established in accordance with the Building Control Act 2007, or who are Chartered Engineers, may sign the statutory certificates of compliance for designers and for assigned certifiers that will be introduced under the new regulations. Depending on their background and experience the persons of experience and long standing reputation referred to may also qualify for consideration for inclusion on the register of Building Surveyors which, as indicated, would also enable them to sign the statutory certificates being introduced under the new regulations. The new regulations will provide for a transition period of 12 months which will, among other things, give sufficient time for eligible persons who have not already done so to apply for registration.

Septic Tank Grants

440. **Deputy Simon Harris** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if a person (details supplied) in County Wicklow may recover some of the cost incurred for a puraflo effluent treatment system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9728/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): On 17 December 2012 I announced my intention to introduce a grant scheme to provide financial assistance to households whose septic tanks and other domestic waste water treatment systems are deemed to require remediation following an inspection under the Water Services (Amendment) Act 2012. The grant scheme will apply to treatment systems which are the subject of an Advisory Notice issued by a water services authority following an inspection carried out under the 2012 Act and the Environmental Protection Agency's National Inspection Plan 2013. Full details of the scheme will be defined in regulations which I will make in advance of inspections commencing later this year.

Local Authority Housing Rents

441. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the number of persons in arrears on their rental of local authority housing; if he will provide a breakdown of these figures down by local authority and length of time in arrears; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9820/13]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): My Department collates and publishes a wide range of housing and planning statistics that inform the preparation and evaluation of policy, and those data are available on my Department's website *www.environ.ie*. Data on rent arrears owing to local authorities are included within this range. However, these data are not broken down by the number of households or by the length of time in arrears. Statistics in relation to 2012 are currently being collated.

Commercial Rates Valuation Process

442. **Deputy Paudie Coffey** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government , further to Parliamentary Question No. 144 of 12 December 2012, which specific section in the Valuation Act 2001 he refers to in his answer; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9877/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): As previously indicated, local authorities are under a statutory obligation to levy rates on any property used for commercial purposes in accordance with the details entered in the valuation lists prepared by the independent Commission of Valuation under the Valuation Act 2001.

The legislation governing the application of rates is not limited to that Act, however, and provisions in relation to rating law range across a number of statutes. The provision that rates may be payable by a subsequent occupier if they cannot be recovered from the person with whom primary liability lies is at section 71 of the Poor Relief (Ireland) Act 1838.

Commercial Rates Exemptions

443. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if all community child care groups have their premises exempt from payment of commercial rates and if so on what basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9895/13]

444. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and

Local Government if he will consider exempting registered private child care facilities from commercial rates on the basis of their educational function; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9896/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 443 and 444 together.

Local authorities are under a statutory obligation to levy rates on any property used for commercial purposes in accordance with the details entered in the valuation lists prepared by the independent Commissioner of Valuation under the Valuation Act 2001. With regard to the application of rates to child care facilities, where child care provision is within a community facility operating in a non-profit capacity, commercial rates do not generally apply.

The levying and collection of rates are matters for each individual local authority. The annual rate on valuation (ARV), which is applied to the valuation of each property, determined by the Valuation Office, to obtain the amount payable in rates is decided by the elected members of each local authority in the annual budget and its determination is a reserved function.

However, it is a matter for the Commissioner of Valuation to decide whether or not a property is rateable and on what basis it is placed on the valuation list. The Valuation Office comes under the remit of my colleague, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform.

Public Sector Staff Issues

445. **Deputy Jerry Buttimer** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if there is a moratorium on former employees of local authority planning departments precluding such former employees from providing planning consultancy services for a period of time after their employment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9943/13]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The Code of Conduct for employees of local authorities was published in June 2004 under Part 15 of the Local Government Act 2001. It is an integral part of the ethical framework for the local government service. The Code includes disclosure requirements concerning employment outside the local government sector and addresses situations concerning a conflict of personal and public interest. The code also provides that officials to whom part 15 of the Act applies shall not, within twelve months of resignation or retirement, accept an offer of employment or consultancy engagement where the nature and terms are such that the question of a conflict of interest could arise without obtaining the approval of the appropriate authority. The twelve month period applies to an employee to whom Part 15 applied at any time during the six month period immediately prior to retirement or resignation.

Local Authority Finances

446. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide a breakdown on a county basis of the debt levels of county councils; if he is satisfied that all local authorities are financially viable; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9947/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): It is a matter for each local authority to manage its own finances in a prudent and sustain-

able manner. Under the Local Government Act 2001, a decision to borrow money is a reserved function of the elected m embers of a local authority. Section 106 of the Act determines that local authorities must obtain the consent of the appropriate Minister to undertake borrowing. Local authorities are asked, as an essential pre-condition to borrowing, to ensure that they achieve balanced revenue and capital accounts.

The total loans payable by each local authority at end 2009 and 2010 as reported in the audited Annual Financial Statements of County, City, Borough and Town Councils is set out in the table below.

Local Authority	2010 €	2009 €
Carlow County Council	40,962,899	41,358,897
Cavan County Council	23,829,337	23,819,719
Clare County Council	119,035,823	118,908,244
Cork County Council	514,459,652	550,598,407
Donegal County Council	123,324,378	133,027,591
Fingal County Council	443,820,638	493,766,630
D.Laoire/Rathdown County Council	167,651,292	185,010,002
Galway County Council	110,126,595	120,075,130
Kerry County Council	97,283,880	98,941,063
Kildare County Council	163,566,100	164,041,579
Kilkenny County Council	55,073,315	56,080,528
Laois County Council	129,866,968	120,084,235
Leitrim County Council	16,449,042	12,649,001
Limerick County Council	65,652,024	65,759,912
Longford County Council	48,865,576	44,303,668
Louth County Council	31,438,555	35,584,343
Mayo County Council	109,749,910	93,571,125
Meath County Council	92,862,599	98,072,345
Monaghan County Council	34,845,191	35,164,449
Tipp NR County Council	53,477,681	53,433,040
Offaly County Council	66,958,610	68,895,143
Roscommon County Council	14,573,427	16,807,152
Sligo County Council	73,744,717	62,789,825
Sth Dublin County Council	261,526,564	256,587,986
Tipp SR County Council	68,981,434	72,216,009
Waterford County Council	48,286,469	49,107,339
Westmeath County Council	107,922,722	103,320,527
Wexford County Council	166,274,246	153,998,217
Wicklow County Council	94,584,015	96,387,603
Cork City Council	179,267,917	197,007,867
Dublin City Council	921,257,896	1,248,414,574
Galway City Council	117,516,778	133,071,074
Limerick City Council	25,612,289	25,824,454
Waterford City Council	84,536,828	80,033,504

Local Authority	2010 €	2009 €
Clonmel Borough Council	5,021,932	5,250,208
Drogheda Borough Council	71,587,301	76,009,172
Kilkenny Borough Council	728,220	847,261
Sligo Borough Council	42,617,756	42,335,861
Wexford Borough Council	4,649,718	4,921,663
Arklow Town Council	65,750	73,038
Athlone Town Council	3,955,029	4,226,609
Athy Town Council	4,473,650	2,336,025
Ballina Town Council	81,996	96,056
Ballinasloe Town Council	0	0
Birr Town Council	299,929	312,814
Bray Town Council	7,453,996	7,477,461
Buncrana Town Council	0	0
Bundoran Town Council	3,282,833	3,535,761
Carlow Town Council	2,750,000	0
Carrick-on-suir Town Council	420,247	418,726
Carrickmacross Town Council	0	0
Cashel Town Council	0	0
Castlebar Town Council	11,965,457	4,771,724
Castleblaney Town Council	61,343	68,410
Cavan Town Council	0	0
Clonakilty Town Council	852,896	2,291,239
Clones Town Council	171,631	179,925
Cobh Town Council	0	0
Dundalk Town Council	50,381,551	52,766,448
Dungarvan Town Council	39,369	44,735
Ennis Town Council	8,546,959	9,212,072
Enniscorthy Town Council	4,528	4,978
Fermoy Town Council	574,537	2,322,332
Kells Town Council	58,200	63,009
Killarney Town Council	3,228,865	3,532,431
Kilrush Town Council	535,888	681,559
Kinsale Town Council	195,456	212,745
Letterkenny Town Council	9,834,861	6,560,140
Listowel Town Council	815,875	967,027
Longford Town Council	3,915,903	5,462,144
Macroom Town Council	0	0
Mallow Town Council	3,814,131	3,761,691
dleton Town Council	0	0
Monaghan Town Council	1,066,114	1,242,313
Naas Town Council	18,048,496	19,831,095
Navan Town Council	5,376,141	3,063,381

Local Authority	2010 €	2009 €
Nenagh Town Council	1,834,779	861,584
New Ross Town Council	1,072,500	0
Skibbereen Town Council	2,368,259	2,434,445
Templemore Town Council	0	0
Thurles Town Council	0	0
Tipperary Town Council	0	0
Tralee Town Council	15,117,088	21,777,374
Trim Town Council	3,048,883	3,199,822
Tullamore Town Council	8,357,585	10,881,067
Westport Town Council	5,152,959	4,244,487
Wicklow Town Council	5,991,184	7,304,973
Youghal Town Council	1,693,765	1,822,643
TOTAL	4,984,898,927	5,426,117,632

Question No. 447 answered with Question No. 431.

Local Authority Finances

448. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the process that will be in place to audit the spending of property taxes in the local communities in which they are collected; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10039/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): The introduction of the Local Property Tax will provide a more sustainable funding model for local government, devolve greater responsibility for financial decisions to the local level, and help renew the relationship between the citizen and his or her local authority.

The audit arrangements which generally apply to local authority financial activity will apply to the Local Property Tax.

The governance framework in relation to financial management and reporting in local authorities is contained primarily within the Local Government Act 2001 and the Local Government (Financial Procedures and Audit) Regulations 2002. Local authorities are subject to a number of financial reporting requirements. Some of these requirements are statutory while others form part of the Department's general governance processes, the financial oversight function s of the Departments of Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform and also specific requirements relating to the EU/IMF programme of support.

Section 108 of the Local Government Act 2001 requires every local authority to prepare an Annual Financial Statement. The annual financial statements of local authorities are audited by the Local Government Audit Service, which provides independent scrutiny of the financial stewardship of local authorities. The independence of the Audit Service is protected in legislation.

In addition, in line with best practice in corporate governance, audit committees have been established in all County and City Councils. Audit committees have an independent role in advising Councils on financial reporting processes, internal control, risk management and audit

matters.

National Spatial Strategy

449. **Deputy John Lyons** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans to engage in a consultation process on the formulation of a replacement spatial plan to the national spatial strategy; if he will provide a timeframe for this consultation and delivery of a new plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10044/13]

450. **Deputy John Lyons** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans to put any successor to the national spatial strategy on a statutory footing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10045/13]

453. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans to reassure the people of Letterkenny, County Donegal, on their serious concerns now that they have lost their Gateway status and are soon to lose their town council. [10111/13]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 449 , 450 and 453 together.

The 2002 National Spatial Strategy (NSS) is Ireland's first national strategic spatial planning framework providing the spatial vision and principles to achieve a better balance of social, economic and physical development and population growth between regions. It serves as a strategic context for spatial planning in Ireland by regional authorities in their regional planning guidelines role, for planning authorities and An Bord Pleanála in their statutory planning functions, and by influencing investment priorities particularly in transport, housing, water services, communications, energy, health and education infrastructure.

The 2002 NSS remains in place, including its focus on developing the Gateway and Hub locations. However, together with Minister Hogan, I will be bringing proposals to Government later this year for a road map to develop a successor strategy. This will take account of the report of the Mahon Tribunal which recommended that the NSS be given a statutory footing in both its preparation and implementation.

I expect the successor to maintain the key principles of the current NSS but to be different in terms of focus and content given that the Regional Planning Guidelines now provide the well-established framework for articulating the NSS at regional level. The key principle of an evidence-based plan-led approach will remain in order to provide the foundation for proper planning and sustainable development, and maximising the role of a successor NSS in supporting overall economic recovery for our country, regions, counties, cities, towns and rural areas.

Light Pollution

451. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the position regarding a letter of support in respect of an organisation (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10049/13]

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.180 of 20 February 2013 which outlines the position in this matter.

Fire Service Staff

452. **Deputy Robert Dowds** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if there will be any recruitment of Fire Service staff in the foreseeable future; and if so, if there will be any age limit placed on such recruitment when it recommences. [10102/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): Fire services are provided by the local authorities in accordance with the provisions of the Fire Services Act 1981 and 2003. Under section 10 of the Act, a fire authority is required to make provision for the delivery of fire services in its functional area, including the assessment of fire cover needs and the provision of premises.

The embargo on the filling of posts in the Local Government Service was introduced on 24 March 2009 following a Government Decision to implement savings measures across the wider public service.

My Department received a delegated sanction from the Department of Finance in August 2009 for implementation of this general moratorium on the filling of public sector posts across all local authorities.

Under section 159 of the Local Government Act 2001, each County and City Manager is responsible for staffing and organisational arrangements necessary for carrying out the functions of the local authorities for which he or she is responsible. In this regard, it is a matter for County and City managers, in the first instance, to ensure that the reduction in staff numbers is managed so that the appropriate service level is maintained within budgetary and staffing constraints.

Where vacancies arise, local authorities must consider all options for reorganisation and reallocation of work to meet requirements. Any exceptions to the moratorium require sanction from my Department.

All staffing sanction requests are examined on a case by case basis having due regard to the continued delivery of key services and the need further to reduce overall staffing levels in the local authority sector. My Department works closely with local authorities to ensure that key posts are filled. In this regard, the majority of the sanctions granted are for the filling of posts in front line service areas such as fire and emergency services, water services, roads maintenance, housing, community and enterprise, and in relation to capital projects. Of the 585 requests received in respect of Fire and Emergency service posts since 2009, 480 have been sanctioned, 8 have been withdrawn, 3 have been refused and 94 are pending.

In view of the financial position facing local authorities, and the country as a whole, it is necessary to continue to focus on achieving the greatest possible savings. In this context, my Department and local authorities will continue to make every effort to ensure that further efficiencies and savings are attained by the sector while an appropriate level of service to the public is maintained.

Question No. 453 answered with Question No. 449.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

454. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if as part of the process of social housing reform, a review of the 2011 social housing assessment regulations has been carried out; if the review has been completed; if any revised regulations or guidance has been issued on foot of the review; if consideration has been

given to giving wider discretion to housing authorities to deal with complex cases such as those involving newly separated persons or situations where persons flee the family home as a result of domestic violence and are in need of long term housing. [10117/13]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): A review of the implementation of the Social Housing Assessment Regulations 2011 has been initiated under the overall programme for social housing reform and this process is on-going. It is intended that revised regulations and guidance will issue to housing authorities once the process is complete. In this context consideration will be given to what wider discretion might be given to housing authorities to address the individually difficult and complex cases which may present to them.

Alternative Energy Projects

455. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government when an application for funding for a Miscanthus plant will be processed in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Carlow. [10120/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): Axes 3 and 4 (LEADER) of the Rural Development Programme for which my Department has responsibility aims to improve the quality of life in rural areas and support the diversification of the rural economy. Axis 1 and 2 specifically support the agricultural aspects of the rural economy, and, accordingly, Axes 3 and 4 are prohibited from supporting activity that involves the production/growth of agricultural products.

The harvesting of such products could also be considered agricultural activity. In this context the operating rules for Axes 3 and 4 specifically state that support can only be considered for post-harvest activity when it relates to agricultural products.

The project referred to in the question involves the processing of miscanthus, a species of grass used as a renewable energy source. The production of such grass can be considered for support under a scheme already available in the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) and it could therefore be considered an agricultural product. Clarification is being sought from the European Commission to determine the appropriate distinction between production and processing, thereby potentially facilitating support under the LEADER elements of the RDP. Pending this clarification, a final approval of the project in question will not be possible. However, my Department will be in contact with Carlow County Development Partnership as soon as possible in regard to this project.

Water Services Registrations

456. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans to bring forward amending legislation and issue guidelines to regulate those bodies or persons deemed to have the appropriate level of qualification to tender expert technical advice as stated in Chapter 6 - Inspections, page 25 of the Environmental Protection Agency document, National Inspection Plan 2013 prepared on behalf of his Department, in relation to the exact remedial works to be undertaken by the owner of a DWWTS; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10129/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): The Water Services (Amendment) Act 2012 assigns responsibility to the Environmental

Protection Agency (EPA) to make a National Inspection Plan for domestic wastewater treatment systems. The National Inspection Plan 2013: Domestic Waste Water Treatment Systems was adopted by the EPA earlier this month and was published on 19 February. It is a function of the 34 county and city councils under the 2012 Act to implement the Plan in their functional areas. I have no direct role in these matters.

Local Government Reform

457. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans to ensure that businesses in the town of Bundoran, County Donegal, will not be subject to higher rates as a direct result of his plans to abolish Bundoran Town Council in favour of bringing it under the remit of Donegal County Council; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10155/13]

458. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans to ensure that the businesses in the town of Letterkenny, County Donegal, will not be subject to higher rates as a direct result of his plans to abolish Letterkenny Town Council in favour of bringing it under the remit of Donegal County Council; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10157/13]

461. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans to ensure that businesses in the town of Buncrana, County Donegal, will not be subject to higher rates as a result of his plans to abolish Buncrana Town Council in favour of bringing it under the remit of Donegal County Council; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10198/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 457, 458 and 461 together.

The Government's Action Programme for Effective Local Government, Putting People First, indicates that in the context of reorganisation of local governance structures, the proposed new municipal districts will provide an opportunity to achieve a more coherent approach to rates and charges on a county-wide basis, having regard to funding requirements and the need to support employment and business competitiveness.

The Action Programme proposes rates harmonisation to cater for differences between Annual Rates on Valuation (ARVs) of towns and counties. My approach to rates harmonisation will seek to ensure, on the one hand, that harmonisation does not lead to significant net loss of revenue in individual counties with consequential implications for services, and on the other hand, that increases in rates do not impact negatively on businesses and employment.

Definitive details, arrangements and procedures in relation to the funding of district level functions, and financial relations between district and county levels, will be developed in the context of the new local government funding arrangements generally, implementation of the new sub-county system and preparation of the legislation in relation to the reform programme.

Departmental Agencies Staff Remuneration

459. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide details of the payment of bonuses or other performance related payments and or allowances made to the staff of agencies under the aegis of his Depart-

ment with a yearly breakdown from 2008 outlining the overall amount paid in each year period and the number of staff that received such payments and or allowances. [10164/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): The information requested is being compiled and will be forwarded to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Departmental Agencies Staff Remuneration

460. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide details of payments made to the CEO or equivalent of all agencies under the aegis of his Department including details of any bonuses, pension entitlements or any other remuneration paid to him or her in 2012. [10181/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): The following table details the remuneration for CEOs and equivalents in agencies under the aegis of my Department. No performance related awards were paid in 2012.

Individuals are entitled to pensions in accordance with the rules of their organisation's pension scheme. In general, pension entitlements are based on final salary and length of service, including added years where appropriate, capped at 40 years.

Agency / Body	Post	Remuneration 2012
An Bord Pleanála	CEO	189,474
Dublin Docklands Development Authority	CEO	113,960
Environmental Protection Agency	Director	164,464
Housing Finance Agency	CEO	122,703
Irish Water Safety	CEO	88,598
Local Government Management Agency	CEO	153,885
Housing & Sustainable Communities Agency	CEO	125,655
Private Residential Tenancies Board	Director	92,352
Radiological Protection Institute	CEO	145,952
Western Development Commission	CEO	85,172

Question No. 461 answered with Question No. 457.

Departmental Legal Costs

462. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide a breakdown of the entire legal costs of defending ECJ Judgement C-188-08 in which the Court found that Ireland had failed to transpose into domestic

legislation the requirements of the Waste Directive regarding the disposal of domestic waste water from septic tanks and other individual treatment systems, excluding any possible fines imposed on Ireland in Case C-374/11; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10226/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): The information requested is being compiled and will be forwarded to the Deputy as soon as possible.

RAPID Programme

463. **Deputy Eoghan Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide a list of those streets in Dublin that are in RAPID areas. [10241/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): My Department does not hold a list of streets in RAPID areas. I will arrange for a set of maps of Dublin RAPID areas to be provided to the Deputy.

Homeless Persons Supports

464. **Deputy Kevin Humphreys** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the amount that was paid for a property (details supplied) in Dublin 2 when it was purchased; the intended use of same; if it was funded by his Department as part of the homelessness strategy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10251/13]

465. **Deputy Kevin Humphreys** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the cost of maintaining security and other services at a premises (details supplied) in Dublin 2 since it was purchased; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10252/13]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 464 and 465 together.

The property in question was acquired by Dublin City Council in 2007 with a purchase price of €6.7 million. The cost of the acquisition was subsequently recouped to Dublin City Council under my Department's Social Housing Investment Programme.

When the property was purchased the City Council's intention was to provide a wet shelter for homeless persons with complex addiction issues. Subsequently the City Council reviewed this approach as it had commenced a process of reconfiguration of homeless services which saw a move away from hostel and shelter type accommodation towards housing-led approaches to tackling homelessness. The property is still in the City Council's ownership and my Department understands that it is considering approaches that would see the property brought into use during 2013.

No application for "Section 10" homelessness funding was ever submitted to my Department and no costs incurred by Dublin City Council in respect of the property, other than the acquisition price, were ever recouped by my Department.

Proposed Legislation

466. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans to introduce climate legislation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10260/13]

472. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if future climate legislation is to be brought before Dáil Éireann, if he will give an assurance that it will be poverty proofed in advance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10322/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 466 and 472 together.

I refer to the reply to Question No. 132 of 5 February 2013.

The final General Scheme of a Bill will, in due course, be subject to a full regulatory impact assessment.

Housing Regeneration

467. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the amount that has been spent over the past five years on retrofitting housing stock; if there is a plan for a new stimulus package this year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10292/13]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): My Department supports a broad range of measures aimed at improving the standard and quality of the social housing stock, including the regeneration of large estates and flat complexes in urban areas, estate-wide remedial works and the retrofitting of older houses and apartments. Over the period 2008 – 2012, some €953 million was recouped to local authorities in respect of projects completed under these measures.

Since the energy retrofitting measure was introduced in 2009, funding of almost €100 million has been provided to local authorities for the retrofitting of older and substandard housing stock. Over that period, some 7,760 dwellings have been improved.

I am currently reviewing the terms of the energy retrofitting measure for 2013 with a view to targeting grants at those older houses and apartments which lack adequate insulation and draught proofing. Local authorities will be asked to pay particular attention to dwellings which accommodate older people and people with disabilities. My Department will issue revised guidelines to local authorities in the context of the capital allocations under the housing programme for 2013. Work is currently underway in this regard and I intend to advise individual authorities of their capital allocations as soon as possible.

Local Authority Housing Provision

468. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the total number of vacant local authority housing units at present and the proposed turnaround for upgrading these homes is versus the actual turnaround for vacant homes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10293/13]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The Seventh Annual Report on Service Indicators, pub-

lished by the Local Government Management Services Board in August 2012, which details service indicators in local authorities in 2010, provides a range of information in relation to the social housing stock in each local authority. Specific information is provided with regard to vacant housing units and on the average number of weeks taken by each local authority, from the date of vacation of a unit to the date when all necessary repairs are carried out, to re-let a unit. Copies of the report are available from the Local Government Management Agency and may be downloaded from their website (*www.lgmsb.ie*).

Question No. 469 answered with Question No. 428.

Tenant Purchase Scheme Eligibility

470. **Deputy Seamus Healy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will confirm the details of the recently announced local authority tenant purchase scheme; the date of publication ; the date of commencement of the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10315/13]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The 1995 tenant purchase scheme for existing local authority houses close d for new applications on 31 December 2012. I intend to replace that scheme with a new scheme based on the incremental purchase model, involving discounts for tenants linked to household income and a discount-related charge on the property that will dwindle away over a period unless the house is resold or the purchaser fails to comply with conditions of the sale. I intend to bring forward the necessary legislative provisions as soon as possible.

Local Authority Finances

471. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the amount of money held on deposit by Kilkenny County Council and Kilkenny Borough Council; if the money is on call or of it is attracting a preferential rate on interest; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10316/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): It is a matter for each local authority to manage its own day-to-day finances in a prudent and sustainable manner, including investment arrangements for the management of moneys received. Information on individual local authorities' investment arrangements is not available in my Department.

The latest audited information for the two Kilkenny local authorities is set out in the following table.

2010 Audited Annual Financial Statements

Local Authority	Current Assets - Bank Investments	Current Assets - Cash at Bank	Current Assets - Cash on Hand	Total
	€	€	€	€
Kilkenny County Council	31,651,683	2,440,203	23,684	34,115,570

Kilkenny Borough Council	13,155	1,349,565	559	1,363,278

Question No. 472 answered with Question No. 466.

Planning Issues

473. **Deputy Derek Nolan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if there is a clause in the Galway County Development Plan that only allows local persons, particularly in Barna, County Galway, to apply for planning permission; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10354/13]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The making, amending and varying of a development plan or local area plan is a reserved function of the elected members of the planning authority for its functional area, in this case Galway County Council who made both the Galway County Development Plan 2009-2015 and the Barna Local Area Plan 2007-2017.

In addition Ministerial Guidelines (which are available on my Department's website at *www.environ.ie*) published under section 28 of the Planning and Development Act, 2000, as amended, require both planning authorities and An Bord Pleanála to have regard to such guidelines in the performance of their functions both in development planning and in determining applications for planning permission in respect of housing.

Question No. 474 answered with Question No. 432.

Criminal Prosecutions Data

475. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if any prosecutions were initiated as a result of information gathered by RTE in the course of its Prime Time programme, Profiting from Prostitution, broadcast on 7 February 2012; the offences charged and the current status of the prosecutions. [9536/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I am informed by the Garda authorities that a number of the individuals who were identified as organising prostitution by the Prime Time programme were under investigation by An Garda Síochána at the time of airing.

An Garda Síochána is currently deploying a multi-agency approach to tackle this type of criminal activity including liaising with the Criminal Assets Bureau and the Department of Social Protection. All available legislation is utilised by members of An Garda Síochána to target and dismantle groups involved in this form of criminality.

As investigations into this matter are ongoing it would be inappropriate for me to comment further at this stage.

Departmental Reports

476. **Deputy Dominic Hannigan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if there are any plans for an inter Departmental report to investigate the activities of mother and baby

homes that operated here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9538/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The operation of maternity services including historical mother and baby homes does not fall within the remit of my Department.

Organised Crime

477. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will consider establishing an all-Ireland joint-taskforce between An Gardaí Siochána and PSNI in order to combat organised crime. [9566/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I am happy to inform the Deputy that there is close and ongoing co-operation between the Garda Síochána and the PSNI on all aspects of policing, including combating organised crime. The Garda Commissioner and the Chief Constable of the PSNI, who are responsible for operational policing co-operation, have repeatedly emphasised that the close and high quality co-operation between their forces has been instrumental in preventing attacks, combating criminality and saving lives.

The two police forces operate a joint Cross-Border Policing Strategy which has as its aims to improve public safety throughout Ireland, to disrupt criminal activity and to enhance the policing capability of both police services on the island. All of these are important elements in enabling the two forces to work more effectively together in tackling crime and promoting community safety for all communities on this island.

Interagency co-operation is a key factor in combating the activities of organised criminal gangs operating on this island and the paramilitary groups who are inextricably linked to them.

I would point the Deputy, for example, to the successful actions that have been taken against a number of groups involved in the laundering and distribution of illegal fuels. These groups, operating in both jurisdictions, have been identified and disrupted, and are now being specifically targeted for investigation by all the enforcement agencies concerned.

These actions have been underpinned by the Cross-Border Task Force on Fuel Laundering and Smuggling which comprises representatives from the two police forces, the two customs services, the Criminal Assets Bureau and the Serious and Organised Crime Agency. This group is in place to enhance joint efforts in tackling fuel laundering and smuggling.

The Deputy will be interested to know that a similar group is in place to support the fight against the criminal activities of groups engaged in tobacco fraud. The same interagency approach is deployed by the Cross Border Tobacco Enforcement Group in order to enhance the effectiveness of actions taken to disrupt this criminality.

I would point out to the House that each year my Department and the Garda authorities, in conjunction with their counterparts in Northern Ireland, organise a Cross-Border Organised Crime Seminar. This provides an opportunity to assess and address the ever changing trends in crime. The fact that the Seminar is now in its eleventh year is testimony to the excellent co-operation that exists between the law enforcement agencies on the island in terms of exchanging knowledge and experience and seeking to further enhance and deepen co-operation and joint-working in the fight against crime.

Garda Transport Data

478. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Garda vehicles by type and category in the Limerick Division serving in the Bruff and Newcastle West (amalgamated with Askeaton) Districts of An Garda Síochána that were available for policing duties in 2011 and 2012 and the mileage that is currently on the vehicles in these districts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9569/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): In the time available it has not been possible for the Garda authorities to supply the information requested by the Deputy. I will be in contact with the Deputy when the information is to hand.

Prison Committals

479. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of males and the number of females who have been committed in the past 12 months for the non-payment of fines; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9574/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I can advise the Deputy that the number of males committed to prison in the past 12 months for failure to pay a Court ordered fine was 6,197. The corresponding figure for females was 1,682.

However, I can advise the Deputy that the number of such persons held in custody at any one time is a minute fraction of the overall prisoner population. To illustrate this point 22 (0.5%) of the prison population of 4261 on 25 February 2013 fell into this category. I expect the number of committals for non-payment of fines to fall substantially once the Fines Bill 2009 has been enacted and brought into force.

Crime Prevention

480. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will consider extending the pilot community text alert scheme to all rural areas where a Garda station has closed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9625/13]

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

Family Law Cases

481. **Deputy John Lyons** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 151 of 7 November 2012, if he will provide an update on his efforts to reform the family court system; if he will provide an up to date timescale for the introduction of a Bill to promote mediation as a viable and cost effective alternative to court proceedings in family law cases to the benefit of all parties. [9633/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): As the Deputy is aware, the

Programme for Government commits the Government to significant reform of the courts, including the establishment of a separate family law court structure that is streamlined, more efficient, and less costly. The Government has approved, in principle my proposals for reforms to our courts structures which will, in due course, require the holding of a Constitutional referendum.

I have initiated a consultation process with interested parties in relation to the establishment of family law courts and am hosting a seminar on 6 July next to discuss how such courts might operate. I have invited an eminent judge from the Australian Family Court to share her experiences of their system. The outcome of the seminar will feed into the process of designing the most appropriate model of family law courts for Ireland.

I intend to bring forward, in the coming months, a Bill to promote mediation as a viable and cost effective alternative to court proceedings. The main objective of the Bill is the reduction of legal costs, the speeding up of dispute resolution and the lessening of the stress involved in court proceedings. These provisions are designed to ensure that the legal framework supports the parties in reaching an agreed and enduring resolution to their disputes where possible.

This measure will further enhance a successful initiative between the Courts Service, the Legal Aid Board and the Family Mediation Service which has been operating in the Dublin District Family Law Courts in Dolphin House since March 2011. The objective is to offer a robust alternative to a court determined outcome and a more appropriate means of resolving certain family disputes through mediation. This project has resulted in a total of 570 agreements finalised without recourse to the courts up to end December 2012. The project was extended further to Naas from September 2012 and to Cork with effect from January 2013.

Garda Vetting of Personnel

482. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will confirm the average time it takes for the Garda Síochána to process vetting applications; the measures he has taken to reduce the amount of time persons are waiting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9643/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I am advised by the Garda Commissioner that the average processing time for vetting procedures at the Garda Central Vetting Unit is currently 8 to 10 weeks. However, seasonal fluctuations and the necessity to seek additional information on particular applications can result in this processing time being exceeded on occasion.

The Garda Central Vetting Unit currently provides employment vetting for approximately 20,000 organisations in Ireland which employ personnel to work in a full time part time, voluntary or student capacity with children and or vulnerable adults and who are registered with the Unit for this purpose. All organisations are aware of the processing time frames for the receipt of vetting and have been advised to factor this into their recruitment and selection processes. T he Unit processed approximately 328,000 vetting applications on behalf of these organisations in 2012. To ensure equity and fairness all applications are dealt with in chronological order from date of receipt.

It is my objective that processing times should be kept to a minimum, while maintaining the overall integrity of the vetting system. In that regard, following discussions with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, I am pleased to announce that sanction was recently granted for an additional 25 staff to be re-deployed from the Department of Agriculture to the

Unit in the near future.

The Deputy may wish to note that Garda Central Vetting Unit will become the National Vetting Bureau under the provisions of the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012 and will have a substantially expanded role under that legislation. I am currently engaged with An Garda Síochána and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in addressing the staffing issues relevant to the coming into force of the 2012 Act.

Citizenship Applications

483. **Deputy Paschal Donohoe** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding an application for naturalisation in respect of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 7; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9738/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): 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 October, 2009.

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.

The granting of Irish citizenship through naturalisation is a privilege and an honour which confers certain rights and entitlements not only within the State but also at European Union level and it is important that appropriate procedures are in place to preserve the integrity of the process.

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.

Legislative Programme

484. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will outline any obstacles preventing him from announcing a commencement order and establishment day in respect of the Personal Insolvency Act 2012; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9763/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I intend to announce a commencement order and establishment day in respect of the Insolvency Service of Ireland under

Section 7 of the Personal Insolvency Act, 2012, in the near future.

Personal Insolvency Act

485. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the discussions he has had with the programme finance troika of the International Monetary Fund, the European Central Bank and the European Commission since 26 December 2012 in respect of the implementation of the Personal Insolvency Act 2012. [9764/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The EU/ECB/IMF Troika team was in Dublin in January 2013 as part of their normal quarterly review of the Programme of Financial Support for Ireland and met with officials from my Department as part of that review process.

The team noted the enactment of the Personal Insolvency Act 2012 which represented significant progress since their last visit. The measures being taken by my Department, the Insolvency Service and other relevant parties to bring about the full operation of the new debt resolution processes were discussed.

Personal Debt

486. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the discussions he has had with the British authorities regarding so-called bankruptcy tourism and the practice of citizens of the State relocating to Britain in order to take advantage of more lenient bankruptcy legislation. [9766/13]

487. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the discussions he has had with European authorities regarding the so-called bankruptcy tourism and the practice of citizens of the State relocating to other member states in order to take advantage of more lenient bankruptcy legislation. [9767/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I propose to take Questions Nos. 486 and 487 together.

I take it that the Deputy is referring to the provisions of the EU Regulation on insolvency proceedings of 2000, which came into effect in 2002. That Regulation is a mutual recognition instrument and does not seek to harmonise EU insolvency laws. In determining an application for the opening of an insolvency proceeding, for which it would have exclusive power as the primary proceedings, of a company or of a natural person, the Regulation requires that a court should determine the centre of main interest (COMI) of the applicant in the context of assuming jurisdiction.

It is a matter for the court to satisfy itself that the provisions in its national law in this regard have been observed. For example, the UK Courts can and have refused or revoked insolvency proceedings where an abuse has been detected. Indeed, this has occurred with certain individuals, who were subsequently subject to insolvency proceedings in this jurisdiction.

A company or natural person is entitled to change a COMI and could do so for the purposes, *inter-alia* of taking advantage of more favourable insolvency legislation. This entitlement arises under the broad rubric of freedom of movement in the Internal Market and such freedom has been enforced by decisions of the European Court of Justice. The country in which the debts are incurred is not necessarily material, but the relocation must not be artificial. The question

of COMI is determined at the date the application for the insolvency proceeding is made and not at the time the debts were incurred. Orders made in insolvency proceedings in another EU jurisdiction, including an order discharging a person from bankruptcy, are enforceable against creditors elsewhere in the EU.

In response to the economic downturn across Europe, the EU has published a proposal to modernise cross-border insolvency law which seeks to make cross-border insolvency proceedings more efficient, benefiting both debtors and creditors throughout the EU. One of the primary aims of the new Regulation will be to give potentially viable companies and entrepreneurs a second chance before being declared insolvent. The proposal also addresses a range of other insolvency issues.

I arranged that the initial discussion on the proposed Regulation took place at the informal Justice and Home Affairs Council meeting of EU Justice Ministers held in Dublin Castle on the 17 and 18 of January last. The Ministers, including my British colleague, engaged in a very detailed and constructive discussion on the proposals contained in the Regulation. I emphasised the importance of a more uniform approach across the EU in regard to the establishment of the centre of main interest so as to combat potential abuses in this regard which have given rise to allegations of "bankruptcy tourism".

Detailed consideration of the provisions contained in the new draft Regulation has now commenced in a Working Group chaired by the Irish Presidency.

Tribunals of Inquiry Reports

488. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 153 of 12 December 2012, the progress made on the recommendations of the Moriarty Tribunal;; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9768/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): As stated in my reply on 12 December 2012, insofar as the report of the Moriarty Tribunal made recommendations concerning the future operation of tribunals of inquiry, many of these recommendations are anticipated by the Tribunals of Inquiry Bill 2005 which awaits Report Stage debate in the Dáil. Other recommendations are the subject of consultation with the Attorney General and other relevant Departments.

With regard to the examination of the report of the Moriarty Tribunal by An Garda Síochána, I am advised by the Garda authorities that the advice of the Director of Public Prosecutions has been sought on the findings of that examination, with a view to determining whether or not a full Garda investigation should now be commenced.

Commercial Leases Database

489. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 823 of 6 November 2012, if he will confirm that the commercial leases database will be published by 31 March 2013; the information that will be available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9769/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): Section 87 of the Property Services (Regulation) Act 2011 provides that the Property Services Regulatory Authority (PSRA) shall maintain and establish a database relating to commercial property leases. Section 87 fur-

ther provides that the database shall, in respect of each relevant commercial lease which is in force, contain the following information: the address and description of the commercial property the subject of the lease; the date of the lease of the property; the term of years of the lease; the rent payable in respect of the property, and certain particulars to be provided to the PSRA in accordance with Section 88 of the 2011 Act. I am advised by the Authority that work on the preparation of the Database is ongoing with the aim of publishing the Database by the end of March 2013.

Garda Expenditure

490. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the cost to the State in 2012 of posting payslips to members of An Garda Síochána; the number of gardaí who are not paid via paypath; the number of gardaí who do not have access to internal email; if he envisages reform in this area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9794/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): All Garda members are paid by way of electronic funds transfer and the total cost of providing payslips for the members concerned in 2012 was €277,235. This figure includes a postage expenditure of €178,323. I have been informed that it is planned to introduce an online payslip facility for Garda members in 2013 which will eliminate that cost. I also understand from the Garda authorities that all Garda members have an internal e-mail account.

National Substance Misuse Strategy

491. **Deputy Nicky McFadden** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will give statutory effect to Section 9 of the Intoxicating Liquor Act 2008 which provides for the structural separation of alcohol products from other products in supermarkets, convenience stores, petrol stations and any other licensed premises which are deemed to be mixed-trading; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9843/13]

522. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will give statutory effect to Section 9 of the Intoxicating Liquor Act (2008) which provides for the structural separation of alcohol products from other products in supermarkets, convenience stores, petrol stations and any other licensed premises which are deemed to be mixed trading; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10215/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I propose to take Questions Nos. 491 and 522 together.

The Report of the Steering Group on a National Substance Misuse Strategy which was published last year contains a broad range of recommendations which seek to address the negative consequences of alcohol misuse and alcohol-related harm in this country. The Department of Health is developing an Action Plan for submission to the Government in response to the Report's recommendations. Future arrangements for the display and sale of alcohol in mixed trading outlets such as supermarkets and convenience stores will be considered by the Government in the context of that Action Plan.

Road Safety Statistics

492. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to

Parliamentary Question No. 130 of 7 February 2012, the Garda districts that are still operating a system of forming an opinion at the scene of a RTC in view of the fact that in previous information supplied in that Parliamentary Question it was stated that in 2012 there was no testing in nine fatal collisions and 52 serious injury collisions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9858/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I have requested a report from the Garda authorities on the matters raised by the Deputy. I will contact the Deputy directly when the report is to hand**.**

Garda Transport Data

493. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will provide in tabular form, the number of new Garda vehicles that were provided by division and district during the years 2008, 2009 and 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9890/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): In the time available it has not been possible for the Garda authorities to supply the information requested by the Deputy. I will be in contact with the Deputy when the information is to hand.

Legal Aid Service Reform

494. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to the topical debate issue of 15 December 2011, the need to tackle growing waiting list for persons requiring free civil legal services from law centres and to consider charging recipients of criminal legal aid, and considering the report of the Task Force on Cost Reductions on Criminal Legal Aid, the status of the examination of the introduction of an application fee for criminal legal aid that was to be undertaken by his Department officials in consultation with the Legal Aid Board and the Office of the Attorney General, completion of which was expected in the second half of 2012; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9903/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I wish to inform the Deputy that under the terms of the Civil Legal Aid Act 1995, as passed by the Oireachtas, the Legal Aid Board is independent in the operation of its functions and decisions on individual cases are a matter for the Board. The Board prioritises certain categories of cases and these cases will receive an immediate or near immediate service. The main categories of case types that are prioritised are public law child care cases, child abduction cases and domestic violence cases. In addition, the Board has been piloting a triage approach to service delivery and this approach is operative in a number of law centres. The pilot is in response to lengthening waiting times. The aim of the triage approach is that every applicant gets to see a solicitor within a period of one month for the purpose of getting legal advice (consultations are broadly limited to 45 minutes). If the applicant requires further services they remain on the waiting list. There is or has been a backlog of applicants to be seen for triage purposes hence it is taking time to reduce the waiting time for such an appointment to one month.

The Board is taking other steps in an effort to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery including introducing a new case management system in its law centres, integrating its mediation and legal services, integrating its Refugee Legal Service into the general law centre service delivery model and maintaining a high level of usage of private solicitors for family law cases in the District Court. The reality is that the Board must live within its budget

and is subject to the public service recruitment moratorium (there is a very limited derogation). Demand for the Board's services has increased significantly since the downturn in the economy. There was a 10% drop in demand at the general law centres in 2012 compared to 2011. However, demand in 2011 was 93% greater than it was in 2006. The capacity to provide a meaningful service is a priority for the Board. In 2013, the Board will examine other options in an effort to enable legal services to be provided promptly to those most in need of them.

In relation to Criminal Legal Aid, total expenditure for 2012 came to €50.5 million, a reduction of 10% over the 2011 figure of €56.1 million. This reduction in the annual expenditure is the largest ever recorded and represents a fall of approximately €10 million, or 16%, over the peak recorded in 2009. As the Scheme is demand led it is difficult to predict and control expenditure because it depends on the number of criminal cases coming before the courts. The Task Force on Cost Reductions on Criminal Legal Aid identified a range of measures which could potentially contribute to costs reductions in this area. As I stated in the Topical Issues debate referred to in the Deputy's question, a requirement on applicants to make an initial payment could give rise to constitutional difficulties and difficulties arising from the European Convention on Human Rights. It would not be feasible to introduce arrangements which give rise to further administrative expense and demands on resources for no real benefit. A new Criminal Legal Aid Bill is planned to update and strengthen the system of granting legal aid including transferring responsibility for the administration of the Scheme to the Legal Aid Board. Consideration is being given to including in the Bill provisions to, *inter alia*, regulate better the taking of statements of means, increase the sanction for false declarations, allow the Board to verify the means of applicants and to prosecute cases of abuse. Provision to give power to the Legal Aid Board to recover the costs of criminal legal aid or to make application to a court to revoke a criminal legal aid certificate are also under consideration. These provisions must have regard to a person's rights to the presumption of innocence, to a fair trial and to be given legal aid, where appropriate. I hope it will be possible to publish the Bill during the course of this year.

Courts Service Issues

495. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the total amount spent on outsourced security services in the Court Services for 2012; and if he will provide details of the companies providing these services. [9910/13]

496. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the total amount spent on outsourced cleaning services in the Court Services for 2012; and if he will provide details of the companies providing these services.; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9911/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I propose to take Questions Nos. 495 and 496 together.

As the Deputy is aware, under the provisions of the Courts Service Act 1998, management of the courts is the responsibility of the Courts Service which is independent in exercising its functions, including the provision and maintenance of accommodation for court sittings. I have had inquiries made in order to be of assistance to the Deputy. I have been informed by the Courts Service that expenditure in 2012 on outsourced security and cleaning services on all court venues, excluding the Dublin Criminal Courts of Justice Complex, was as set out in the following tables:

Security Services (2012 expenditure)

G4S Secure Solutions (IRE) Ltd	€940,981
Pinnacle Security Group	€22,772
Synergy Security Solutions Ltd	€5,874
Securikey Limited	€1,839
Screen Guard Ireland Ltd	€1,073
S-Security Group Ltd	€610
Morbury Ltd T/A Top Security	€572
Total Expenditure	€973,721

Cleaning Services (2012 expenditure)

G4S Support Services (Ireland) Ltd	€1,011,039
Grosvenor Cleaning Services Ltd	€286,543
OCS One Complete Solution Ltd	€237,708
Payments to County Councils	€43,279
The Cleaning Corporation Ltd	€20,594
Emerald Facility Services	€15,384
Noonan Services Group	€12,979
Albert Maintenance Services	€5,512
Martin Reilly	€4,872
Navscan Property Services Ltd	€792
Garvin Cleaning	€454
Woods Environmental Services,	€170
Ever Kleen	€141
Reflections Cleaning Services	€50
Total Expenditure	€1,639,517

The county council payments refers to payments to various county councils in relation to cleaning costs. Security and cleaning services for the Criminal Courts of Justice are provided as part of the overall PPP contract and form part of the monthly unitary payment charge of approximately €21.4 million (including VAT) per annum over a 25-year period. The PPP payment includes provision for structural maintenance and operation of certain services within the Criminal Courts of Justice.

Garda Expenditure

497. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the total amount spent on outsourced security services in the Garda civilian section for 2012; and if he will provide details of the companies providing these services. [9912/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): In the time available it has not been possible for the Garda authorities to supply the information requested by the Deputy. I will be in contact with the Deputy when the information is to hand.

Garda Expenditure

498. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the total amount spent on outsourced cleaning services in the Garda civilian section for 2012; and if he will pro-

vide details of the companies providing these services. [9913/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The Garda Commissioner is the Accounting Officer for the Garda Vote. In that context, I am informed by the Garda authorities that their financial records do not distinguish between cleaning services provided in respect of premises occupied by civilian staff and other premises utilised by the Force. In the circumstances, the information sought by the Deputy is not readily available and the Garda authorities have advised that the extraction of the relevant data would require a disproportionate amount of Garda resources.

Proposed Legislation

499. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when the Civil Court of Appeal, which has been promised for the past two years will be introduced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9927/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The Government has approved, in principle, the holding of a referendum to allow, *inter alia*, for the establishment of a new Court of Appeal and for the drafting of the necessary legislative scheme. Work to this end is progressing in my Department. While the precise timing of a referendum is a matter for the Government to decide in due course, the intention is that it will be held on the same day as at least one other referendum.

Garda Transport Data

500. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to deal with the problems in An Garda Síochána due to the fleet of cars being at an all time low (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9946/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): Decisions in relation to the provision and allocation of Garda vehicles are a matter for the Garda Commissioner in the context of his identified operational demands and in the light of available resources.

The Deputy will be aware that I made an additional €3 million available to An Garda Síochána towards the end of last year enabling the Commissioner to procure a further 171 Garda vehicles. This brought total investment in the Garda fleet in 2012 to €4 million and resulted in a total of 213 new vehicles being procured during the year. The roll out of the most recently purchased transport is on-going and the Deputy can be assured that the vehicles will be deployed as effectively as possible.

In addition, a further allocation of €5 million is being provided for the purchase and fit-out of Garda transport this year. This represents a very considerable financial investment in Garda transport, particularly at a time when the level of funding available across the public sector is severely limited. It is a clear indication of my commitment to ensure that, to the greatest extent possible, An Garda Síochána are provided with sufficient resources to enable them to provide an effective and efficient policing service.

Upward Only Rent Reviews

501. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to

Parliamentary Question No. 568 of 19 February 2013, if he will share the economic analysis of possible policy options in relation to the proposal to abolish upward only rent review clauses in existing leases prepared by the Department of Finance referred to; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9961/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): As indicated in my reply to Question No. 568 of 19 February 2013, my Department had available to it an economic analysis of possible policy options in relation to the proposal to abolish upward only rent review clauses in existing leases which had been prepared by the Department of Finance and which formed part of the deliberative process in the context of the Government's consideration of the matter. Given that the document in question was prepared by the Department of Finance, I have asked that Department to consider the Deputy's request for access.

Garda Stations Opening Hours

502. **Deputy Seán Kenny** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the Garda stations in the Dublin region that will have an open day over the next six months; the dates and times of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9998/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I have been informed by the Garda Commissioner, who has responsibility for these matters, that there is one Open Day scheduled to take place in the next six months in the Dublin Metropolitan Region. This Open Day is due to take place at Clondalkin Garda Station on the 29th June 2013, between 2.00pm and 5.00pm.

Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission Issues

503. **Deputy Seán Kenny** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the criteria senior Garda management take when choosing what to charge sporting organisations and so on for policing their events; if the charge is per match, per number of matches or the end of season when Garda management send their bill to cover policing their events; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9999/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The setting of charges for Garda policing services is a function which has been assigned to the Garda Commissioner under section 30 of the Garda Síochána Act 2005. In that context the Commissioner determines the circumstances in which such charges arise and I do not have a role in relation to the matter.

I have been informed by the Garda authorities that where charges arise in connection with policing services provided for an event the cost to the event holder is determined by the number of Garda personnel deployed. The operational policing plan for a particular event is formulated by local Garda operational management and the relevant Garda invoices are issued centrally from the Garda Finance Directorate for specific events.

Garda Transport Provision

504. **Deputy Seán Kenny** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if new garda vehicles were allocated to the R District in 2012; if they were marked or unmarked Garda cars or vans; if this district will be receiving additional vehicles in 2013; if so, when will the district be given the new vehicles; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10000/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): Decisions in relation to the provision and allocation of Garda vehicles are a matter for the Garda Commissioner in the context of his identified operational demands and in the light of available resources. I am advised by the Garda authorities that 2 marked Garda vehicles were allocated to the R District in the Dublin Metropolitan Region North Division in 2012.

The Deputy will be aware that I made an additional €3 million available to An Garda Síochána towards the end of last year, bringing to €4 million the total investment in 2012 and enabling the Force to procure a total of 213 vehicles. The roll out of the most recently acquired vehicles to Garda Divisions throughout the country is ongoing. In that context, I have been informed by the Garda authorities that 3 of these vehicles are being allocated to the Dublin Metropolitan Region North Division.

In addition, a further allocation of €5 million is being provided for the purchase and fit-out of Garda transport this year. The funding will enable An Garda Síochána to obtain a significant number of new vehicles and it is a matter which is under active consideration by Garda authorities. The Deputy can be assured that the vehicles will be deployed as effectively as possible in line with An Garda Síochána's operational requirements.

This represents a very considerable financial investment in Garda transport, particularly at a time when the level of funding available across the public sector is severely limited. It is a clear indication of my commitment to ensure that, to the greatest extent possible, An Garda Síochána are provided with sufficient resources to enable them to provide an effective and efficient policing service.

Immigration Policy

505. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality in view of President Obama's proposal to allow 11 million illegal immigrants to move toward a path of citizenship over eight years, if he will consider a similar incentive such as a regularisation scheme to include certain undocumented migrants to move towards citizenship if they comply with a list of requirements; if not, if he will consider other initiatives that seek to relieve the situation that illegality contributes to undocumented migrants here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10032/13]

Immigration Policy

506. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality in terms of a case by case regularisation scheme here what are the requirements set out for an undocumented migrant to gain legality here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10033/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I propose to take Questions Nos. 505 and 506 together.

It is the responsibility of all non EEA nationals who are resident in the State to ensure that they have an appropriate permission from the Minister for Justice and Equality. All States operate immigration controls for well established reasons of public policy, including considerations of an economic nature which in the case of Ireland remains extremely challenging with ongoing high levels of unemployment. There are also considerations based on maintaining the integrity of the Common Travel Area with the UK which must be taken into account.

Legal and illegal migration are two sides of the same coin and a balanced policy needs to facilitate regular migration channels while at the same time take action against immigration abuse. Many people from overseas have made Ireland their home in recent years. In this context it is worth noting that many of the EU citizens who arrived here during times of economic prosperity have chosen to remain notwithstanding the change in economic circumstances. In addition, many individuals have been granted citizenship in recent years. Over the past two years alone, approximately 38,000 individuals have successfully applied for and been successful in their citizenship applications, approximately 13,000 in 2011 and approximately 25,000 in 2012.

Of course, citizenship is not the only means of attaining lawful residence in the State. For example, through an accrual of employment permits an individual may choose to apply for long term residence, or to continue to renew his or her status on an annual basis. Tens of thousands of immigrants have remained on in the State on foot of such provisions.

Clearly, all illegal immigrant cases are not the same and must be dealt with on a case by case basis and on the basis of their individual circumstances. At one end of the scale are those where the person's illegal status is through no fault of their own and indeed my Department has been dealing with cases of this nature on an ongoing basis. However there are also much more egregious instances of immigration abuse, often at considerable expense to the State and it does not follow that such persons should profit from their conduct.

At EU Level, the Member States, in agreeing the European Pact on Immigration and Asylum at the European Council in October 2008 made specific commitments "to use only case-by-case regularisation, rather than generalised regularisation, under national law, for humanitarian or economic reasons". While the Pact is not legally binding, the political commitment among Member States, then and now, is clearly against any form of process that would in any way legitimise the status of those unlawfully present without first examining the merits of their individual cases.

In looking at cases as they arise, among the issues that would be relevant to the outcome would be the circumstances in which the person became undocumented, the length of time they have been in that situation, their prospects of being able to gain lawful employment without being a drain on the financial resources of the State along with the more general considerations applicable to immigration decisions, including any family related rights they may have in the context of the European Convention on Human Rights.

Sometimes case by case consideration will result in a positive outcome for the applicant. However, in other cases this may result in a decision by the Irish authorities, subject to the oversight of our Courts, that the person has to go home. That decision should be respected.

Road Traffic Offences

507. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of holders of category W driving licences that have been convicted for towing a trailer on a work vehicle or land tractor in each of the years 2010, 2011 and 2012; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10043/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The Garda Síochána Act 2005 makes provision for the compilation and publication of crime statistics by the Central Statistics Office (CSO), as the national statistical agency, and the CSO has established a dedicated unit for this purpose. I have requested the CSO to provide statistics directly to the Deputy.

Drugs Seizures

508. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to parliamentary Question No. 589 of 19 February 2013, the most likely source of the prescription drugs available on the illegal market; the basis on which the values of seizures are calculated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10046/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): As indicated in my response to Parliamentary Question No.589 of 19 February 2013, there are a number of ways in which prescription drugs can become available on the illegal market and steps are being taken to address this.

With regard to the further information sought by the Deputy, I am informed by the Garda authorities that the primary sources of prescription drugs being illegally sold in Ireland are as follows - internet based purchases; theft from legitimate industry; importation and distribution by organised criminal gangs and the misuse of prescriptions.

I am further informed that the estimated value of prescription drugs is calculated on the basis of the current market values of these drugs at street level in this jurisdiction. These values are subject to regular review by the Garda National Drugs Unit.

Departmental Bodies

509. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will outline the governance arrangements that are currently in place regarding the operations of the Equality Authority and IHRC and the implications of these for the independent and effective operation of these bodies, in view of the fact that neither body has had a board in place since mid 2012; when the legislation to establish the Human Rights and Equality Commission will be before Dáil Éireann; and when the commission and chief commissioner will be in situ. [10094/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): As the Deputy will be aware, the Human Rights Commission and the Equality Authority are currently in the process of merging to form the new Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC). This new streamlined body will be able to more effectively, efficiently and cohesively promote human rights and equality in Ireland.

The drafting of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Bill 2013 is at an advanced stage and I expect I will be in a position to bring this to Cabinet in the near future. Pending my being able to make an announcement in relation to appointments to the new Commission, I can inform the Deputy that the executive of both bodies have put a liaison mechanism in place to ensure the necessary preliminary arrangements for the merger can be progressed on an administrative basis. My Department has no role in this liaison mechanism and the effective operation and independence of IHREC in compliance with the Paris Principles is a key priority for me and not in doubt in the merger process.

Deportation Orders Issues

510. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the basis on which a person (details supplied) in County Carlow is being deported when they were employed here for more than five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10099/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The person concerned had her case examined in accordance with 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. Refoulement was not found to be an issue here. In addition, no issue arises under Section 4 of the Criminal Justice (UN Convention against Torture) Act, 2000. Consideration was also given to private and family rights under Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR).

I am satisfied that the person concerned had her case fairly and comprehensively examined and, therefore, the decision to make a Deportation Order against her is justified. She is therefore illegally present in the State.

A Deportation Order was signed on 17 January 2013. The effect of the Deportation Order is that the person concerned must leave the state and remain thereafter outside the State. The enforcement of the Deportation Order is an operational matter for the Garda National Immigration Bureau.

However, if new information or circumstances have come to light, which have a direct bearing on her case and which have arisen since the original Deportation Order was made, there remains the option of applying to me for revocation of the Deportation Order pursuant to the provisions of Section 3 (11) of the Immigration Act, 1999, as amended. However I wish to make clear that such an application would require substantial grounds to be successful.

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.

Garda Recruitment

511. **Deputy Robert Dowds** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if there will be any age limit for the recruitment of gardaí when recruitment recommences in 2015, in view of the fact that there has been a moratorium in place for some time; and if so, if it is possible to say at this point what the age limit will be. [10100/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): Recruitment to An Garda Síochána is governed by Statutory Regulations, namely the Garda Síochána (Admission & Appointments) Regulations 1988/2005. The maximum recruitment age is set at 35 years for full time members and there are no plans at this time to increase the upper age limit for recruitment.

Magdalen Laundries Issues

512. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the families of persons who are now deceased but who spent time in the Magdalen laundries will be entitled to claim from the redress board; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10110/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The Government have decided that any scheme introduced will only apply to living persons who were in the institutions. It will not extend to the families of persons now deceased.

Personal Insolvency Act

513. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason he is proposing a three year bankruptcy law as opposed to the UK Government which is operating on a one year system, resulting in persons choosing to travel there to be declared bankrupt. [10121/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The Personal Insolvency Act 2012 makes provision for the automatic discharge of a bankruptcy, subject to certain conditions, after three years from the date of adjudication. This is a reduction from the previous 12 years discharge period.

I believe that the period of three years for automatic discharge is a reasonable one and represents a balance between the legitimate interests and expectations of creditors and debtors. The period is broadly in line with the European norm in regard to discharge from insolvency. The length of the discharge in other jurisdictions, including the UK, is not a matter over which I have control. However, as I indicated during the Oireachtas debates on the passage of the Personal Insolvency Act, I will keep all matters under review, including this particular issue.

Under the provisions of the EU Regulation on insolvency proceedings of 2000, a company or natural person may apply to a court for the opening of insolvency proceedings in any Member State of the EU. In determining an application for the opening of an insolvency proceeding, the Regulation requires that a court should determine the centre of main interest of the applicant in the context of assuming jurisdiction. It is a matter for the court to satisfy itself that the provisions in its national law in this regard have been observed. For example, the UK Courts can and have refused or revoked insolvency proceedings where an abuse has been detected.

Legal Aid Service Expenditure

514. **Deputy Regina Doherty** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the amount of funding that was given to Free Legal Advice Centres for the periods 2010, 2011 and 2012; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10124/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I wish to inform the Deputy that my Department made available the sum of €98,000 to the Free Legal Advice Centres (FLAC) in each of the years 2010, 2011 and 2012.

Sentencing Policy

515. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans for establishing sentencing guidelines; if he intends to set up a sentencing council; the discussions he has held with the LRC on this issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10132/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The Deputy will appreciate that judges are independent in the matter of sentencing, as in other matters concerning the exercise of judicial functions, subject only to the Constitution and the law. In accordance with this principle, the role of the Oireachtas has been to specify in law a maximum penalty and a court, having considered all the circumstances of the case, to impose an appropriate penalty up to that maximum. The court is required to impose a sentence which is proportionate not only to the crime but to the individual offender, in that process identifying where on the sentencing range the particular case should lie and then applying any mitigating factors which may be present.

There are, of course, a small number of situations where statute has created exceptions to this approach most notably by providing for mandatory sentences for murder and presumptive minimum sentences in the case of certain firearms and drug trafficking offences. Except for exceptional circumstances, I am of the view that the Oireachtas should be cautious in prescribing mandatory sentences. An important safeguard rests in the power of the Director of Public Prosecutions to apply to the Court of Criminal Appeal to review a sentence she regards as unduly lenient. The Law Reform Commission is currently examining the law in relation to mandatory sentences and I understand that this work will be completed this year.

It would not be in keeping with the principles of judicial independence for the Executive to impose a Sentencing Council on the Judiciary. For similar reasons, the Deputy may be aware that the Law Reform Commission, after detailed study some years ago, recommended against the introduction of statutory sentencing guidelines but favoured non-statutory sentencing principles. The Superior Courts have developed a substantial body of case law setting out general principles of sentencing. Sentencing practice is also being developed by a steering committee of the judiciary which developed the Irish Sentencing Information System (ISIS) website, a pilot initiative designed to gather information about the range of sentences and other penalties that have been imposed for particular types of offences across court jurisdictions. Information on over 1,000 cases is detailed on the website and I welcome the committee's recent announcement that two JobBridge interns are to be appointed shortly in order to recommence populating the online database with information on sentencing in the criminal courts.

The Deputy may also be aware that the ISIS committee announced they are planning to recommence providing information on sentencing in relation to specific issues in which context an analysis has been published on rape sentencing prepared by the Judicial Researchers Office under the guidance of Mr. Justice Peter Charleton. I understand that seminars are also planned, including one focusing on the work of the Sentencing Council in the UK.

Finally, in September 2012, I announced a strategic review of penal policy. I have established a working group to carry out this review which will examine all aspects of penal policy and I expect the Group to report later this year.

Garda Transport Data

516. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 129 of 7 February 2013, of the 31 patrol vehicles allocated to the Tipperary division if he will provide a breakdown by district of the number of these cars that are operated by the traffic corps within their division; the number that are used solely for patrol purposes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10139/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): Decisions in relation to the provision and deployment of Garda transport are matters for the Garda Commissioner. Responsibility for the efficient deployment of official Garda vehicles in each Division is assigned to the Divisional Officer, who may allocate vehicles between stations, as required by operational circumstances.

In that context, I am informed by the Garda authorities that there are currently 31 patrol vehicles allocated to the Tipperary Division. Of these vehicles 3 are currently assigned to the Traffic Corps, 2 of which are attached to the Thurles Garda District and 1 to the Cahir Garda District . The current breakdown of vehicles by District is provided in the following table:

District	Patrol vehicles

Cahir	8
Clonmel	5
Nenagh	4
Templemore	5
Thurles	8
Tipperary	1
Total	31

It should be noted that whilst Garda vehicles may be designated as Traffic Corps vehicles by reason of their livery, all Garda vehicles are required to engage in traffic policing as part of their routine duties.

Departmental Agencies Staff Remuneration

517. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will provide details of the payment of bonuses or other performance related payments and or allowances made to the staff of agencies under the aegis of his Department with a yearly breakdown from 2008 outlining the overall amount paid in each year period and the number of staff that received such payments and or allowances. [10169/13]

518. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will provide details of payments made to the CEO or equivalent of all agencies under the aegis of his Department including details of any bonuses, pension entitlements or any other remuneration paid to him or her in 2012. [10186/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I propose to take Questions Nos. 517 and 518 together.

The collation of information in respect of each year from 2008 to 2011 would require a disproportionate use of available resources which could not be justified in current circumstances where there are other significant demands on resources. Accordingly the information set out below is in respect of 2012.

In relation to allowances the Deputy will be aware that the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform carried out a review of public service allowances in 2012 and details of allowances reviewed, including those in the Justice Sector, were published by that Department and are available on www.per.gov.ie.

No bonus payments or other performance related payments were made to any staff of my Department or to any staff of its agencies in 2012. Details of remuneration of post holders in the role of Chief Executive Officer or relevant position in 2012 in each of the agencies of the Department of Justice and Equality is set out in the table below.

Name of Body	CEO/Equivalent	Salary scale 2012
Equality Authority	CEO	Assistant Secretary scale€127,796 - €146,191
Equality Tribunal	Director	Assistant Secretary scale€127,796 - €146,191
Human Rights Commission	President*CEO**	€199,000Assistant Secretary scale€127,796 - €146,191
Courts Service	CEO	Secretary General €188,640

Name of Body	CEO/Equivalent	Salary scale 2012
Garda Síochána Complaints Board	CEO	Assistant Secretary scale€127,796 - €146,191
Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission (GSOC)	ChairpersonTwo Commissioners	Garda Deputy Commissioner€157,000Assistant Secretary scale€127,796 - €146,191
An Garda Síochána	Commissioner	Commissioner€185,000
Insolvency Service of Ireland	Director	Assistant Secretary scale€127,796 - €146,191
Legal Aid Board	CEO	Assistant Secretary scale€127,796 - €146,191
National Disability Authority	CEO	Principal Officer Higher scale€85,957 - €105,429
National Property Services Regulatory Authority	CEO	Principal Officer Higher scale€85,957 - €105,429
Office of the Data Protection Commissioner	Data Protection Commissioner	Assistant Secretary scale€127,796 - €146,191
Private Security Authority	CEO	Principal Officer Higher€85,957 - €105,429 plus director's allowance €11,978
Property Registration Authority	Interim CEO	Deputy Registrar€93,197 - €113,503 plus acting up allowance €12,000

*The term of office of the President of the Human Rights Commission ended on 31st July 2012

**The position of CEO of the Human Rights Commission became vacant on 30th January 2012

All post holders, with the exception of the former President of the Human Rights Commission and the Chairperson of the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission (GSOC), are members of the relevant civil/public service pension scheme for established or non-established staff. The former President of the Human Rights Commission had no pension entitlements in respect of his position as President. In lieu of membership of a pension scheme payments not exceeding 11% of salary are paid to the Chairperson of GSOC in respect of Personal Retirement Savings Accounts (PRSAs) .

In addition to these posts, there are also a number of other full-time Heads of Office in the Justice and Equality Sector (generally remunerated at salary scales applicable to grades between Principal Officer and Deputy Secretary level) who are responsible for areas such as the Irish Prison Service, the Probation Service, the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service, the Refugee Appeals Tribunal, the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner, the Forensic Science Laboratory, the Garda Síochána Inspectorate, the Irish Film Classification Office, the State Pathology Service etc.

Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission Issues

519. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will

report on Garda Operation Light Up; the number of on the spot fines issued; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10211/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I have requested a report from the Garda authorities on the matters raised by the Deputy. I will contact the Deputy directly when the report is to hand**.**

Garda Reserve

520. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Garda Reserves allocated to each station in the Dublin region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10212/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I have been informed by the Garda Commissioner that the number of Reserves attached to each Garda Station in the Dublin Metropolitan Region (D.M.R.) on 31 January 2013, the latest date for which all figures are readily available, was as set out in the table hereunder:

Station	Total
D.M.R.S.C.	
Kevin Street	11
Kilmainham	8
Pearse St	30
Harcourt Tce	0
Donnybrook	7
Irishtown	7
Total	63
DMR NC	
Store Street	19
Bridewell	14
Fitzgibbon Street	0
Mountjoy	17
Total	50
DMR NORTH	
Santry	12
Whitehall	0
Ballymun	13
Raheny	5
Clontarf	2
Howth	4
Coolock	9
Swords	7
Malahide	4
Balbriggan	7
Total	63
DMR EAST	
Dun Laoghaire	8

Station	Total
Dalkey	0
Cabinteely	0
Kill-O-Grange	0
Shankill	2
Blackrock	4
Dundrum	3
Stepaside	0
Total	17
DMR SOUTH	
Crumlin	7
Sundrive Road	6
Tallaght	12
Rathfarnham	6
Rathmines	7
Terenure	8
Total	46
DMR WEST	
Cabra	1
Finglas	15
Blanchardstown	20
Lucan	14
Ronanstown	2
Ballyfermot	2
Clondalkin	4
Rathcoole	0
Total	58
DMR TOTAL	297

Garda Transport Data

521. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Garda community relations vans currently allocated to the Dublin region in 2010, 2011 and 2012; the stations in which they are allocated; if this number will be further increased in 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10213/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): In the time available it has not been possible for the Garda authorities to supply the information requested by the Deputy. I will be in contact with the Deputy when the information is to hand.

Question No. 522 answered with Question No. 491.

European Arrest Warrant Issues

523. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to the extradition proceeding in respect of a person (details supplied) if he will instruct his officials to

seek a negotiation between the Irish and Hungarian authorities that ultimately yields a solution, agreeable to all the parties involved; if he will confirm that his officials have exhausted all possible options to facilitate the serving of the sentence here without first having to travel to Hungary; the extent to which he can take the lead in seeking a mutually satisfactory conclusion to this tragic affair, by virtue of Ireland's current role as EU president. [10233/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The Hungarian authorities issued a European arrest warrant for the person in question in 2005. Surrender was refused in the High Court on the basis that the person concerned had not fled the state in question, which was a requirement of the European Arrest Warrant Act at that time. The decision of the High Court was appealed to the Supreme Court which affirmed the original decision to refuse surrender.

Legislation was subsequently amended to remove the 'fled' requirement in respect of persons sought to serve a sentence in the issuing state. This amendment brought the Act into closer compliance with the relevant EU Framework Decision which referred to 'fleeing' in the Recital but did not include the term in the relevant Article.

After the legislation was changed, the Hungarian authorities submitted a new warrant. The High Court ordered the surrender of the person concerned and that Order was appealed to the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court upheld the appeal and refused to surrender the person.

As the Deputy will be aware, the courts are, subject only to the Constitution and the law, independent in the exercise of their functions. In the circumstances, I am not in a position to make any further comment in the matter other than to say that there are no further EAW proceedings pending in this jurisdiction.

The Deputy will appreciate that persons can be detained only in accordance with law and, while this case has been the subject of extensive contact between the Irish and Hungarian authorities, there is no action open to me by virtue of Ireland's current role as EU President in relation to this matter.

Residential Institutions Issues

524. **Deputy Gerald Nash** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will give consideration to the inclusion of former residents of an institution (details supplied) in the redress scheme under the aegis of Mr. Justice Quirke; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10245/13]

525. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason an institution (details supplied) has been excluded from the proposed Magdalen redress scheme; the options available to those who were in the school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10249/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I propose to take Questions Nos. 524 and 525 together.

The Government is not aware of any evidence that would warrant consideration being given to including the two institutions within the scope of the scheme being established for the benefit of women who were formerly in the Magdalen Laundries.

Garda Transport Expenditure

526. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality in view of his statement that Gardaí now had vehicles which had been converted into mobile Garda offices, if he will explain the following, what exactly is a mobile Garda office; what type of vehicles are they; the number of them that are available; is it proposed to have some of these mobile Garda offices in County Kerry; if there is, how many of them; how much does it cost to change one of these Garda vehicles to a mobile Garda office; are they new or are they taken from the existing fleet; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10261/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): As the Deputy is aware, the deployment of Garda mobile offices is one of a set of measures being implemented by the Garda Commissioner to take account of the closure of certain Garda stations. In that context, the Deputy will appreciate that where stations have been closed a comprehensive set of revised structures has been put in place. In particular, the Garda authorities have emphasised that the Force will continue to support the relevant communities through the clustering of services in policing hubs. This centralisation facilitates enhanced patrolling arrangements which, in turn, provide increased Garda visibility as well as maintaining existing Garda links with communities.

With regard to the mobile office initiative, I understand from the Garda authorities that five new vans have been purchased for conversion to mobile offices. Arrangements are currently being made for the necessary conversion work which will result in the provision of a public area, counter and office facilities. In addition I understand that the mobile offices will be brought into service as quickly as possible.

Asylum Seeker Accommodation

527. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality following the review by the UN Committee Against Torture where the committee recommends that the State partly take measures to ensure that all persons detained for immigration related reasons are held in facilities that are appropriate to their status, his views on the current situation relating to immigration related detainees; and the plans that have been made to make appropriate facilities available. [10288/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): Arrangements for the detention of non-nationals on immigration grounds are a matter for the Garda National Immigration Bureau. Under these arrangements persons are generally accommodated in the committal facility for the area in which their case is processed. The detention of non-nationals is subject to judicial oversight which includes recourse to the courts for all detainees. Detention must also be in accordance with national and international law, in particular the European Convention on Human Rights which requires every organ of the State to perform its functions in a manner compatible with the State's obligations under the Convention.

Places of detention are subject to rigorous inspection systems governed by both national and international oversight bodies. The existing international system of inspection operates under the auspices of the Council of Europe Convention for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment which Ireland has been a party to since 1989 while the Office of the Inspector of Prisons is responsible for national oversight arrangements.

The Optional Protocol to the UN Convention against Torture and All Forms of Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, signed by Ireland on 2nd October, 2007, establishes a national and international inspection system for places of detention which is modelled to a significant extent on the Council of Europe Convention for the Prevention of Torture and

Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

The Government has approved the drafting of a General Scheme of an Inspection of Places of Detention Bill, which will include provisions to enable ratification of the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention against Torture. Subject to competing legislative priorities, it is expected that the General Scheme will be completed early this year.

Asylum Seeker Accommodation

528. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the amount paid by his Department to asyslum centre firms for the past five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10295/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The Reception and Integration Agency (RIA), a functional unit of the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department, is responsible for the accommodation of persons while their applications for international protection are being processed. Currently there are 4,819 persons accommodated throughout the State in 35 centres under contract to RIA.

The amounts paid to contractors for accommodation and ancillary services for asylum seekers over the past 5 years are as follows:

Year	Amount
2008	€91.47m
2009	€86.50m
2010	€79.07m
2011	€69.45m
2012	€62.3m

The Deputy may also wish to note that published on RIA's website – www.ria.gov.ie - are its Annual Reports for the years 2007 to 2011 inclusive. These reports include details of spending for those years, showing total payments for contracts in respect of State owned, commercial and self catering centres; for transport costs; for utility costs in State owned centres; and for miscellaneous payments. The 2012 report is being compiled and will be published as soon as possible.

Garda Deployment

529. **Deputy Gerald Nash** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will outline the Garda personnel resources allocated to provide policing and patrol car support in the Cooley Peninsula area, County Louth; the number of vehicles available to the gardaí in this area for the years 2010, 2011, 2012 and to date in 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10311/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The Deputy will be aware that the Commissioner is responsible for the detailed allocation of resources, including personnel and transport, throughout the organisation and I have no direct function in the matter. This allocation of resources is constantly monitored in the context of demographics, crime trends, policing needs and other operational strategies in place on a District, Divisional and Regional level to ensure optimum use is made of Garda resources and the best possible Garda service is provided to the public.

I have been informed by the Commissioner that the Cooley Peninsula is policed by the Garda sub-districts of Carlingford and Omeath which are in the Dundalk District. The strength of the those stations on the 31 January 2013, the latest date for which figures were readily available, was 6 and 4 respectfully. Also on that date there were 149 Gardaí assigned to the Dundalk Garda District.

The following table sets out the Garda vehicles allocated to Dundalk District;

	Total
As at 22 February 2013	20
2012	20
2011	22
2010	23

The allocation of Garda vehicles is monitored and reviewed on a continual basis. The responsibility of for the efficient deployment of all official Garda vehicles in each Division is assigned to the Divisional Officer, who may allocate vehicles between Stations as required by operational circumstances

Naturalisation Applications

530. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when a person (details supplied) in County Offaly may expect a decision on their application for naturalisation. [10350/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): 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 July, 2011.

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.

The granting of Irish citizenship through naturalisation is a privilege and an honour which confers certain rights and entitlements not only within the State but also at European Union level and it is important that appropriate procedures are in place to preserve the integrity of the process.

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.

Personal Insolvency Act

531. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 518 of 12 February 2013, if he will provide a specific date for when the Personal Insolvency Service will accept applications from borrowers seeking debt relief and specific dates for when case studies of resolutions will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10352/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The Insolvency Service is currently focused on priority work streams for the establishment of the Office.

The date when the Personal Insolvency Service will accept applications from borrowers will be determined by the finalisation of the Information Technology infrastructure currently being developed which will operate between the Personal Insolvency Practitioner, the ISI and the Courts Service. It is also dependent on the selection and appointment of six new specialist Judges to the Circuit Court and the making of Regulations for the authorisation and supervision of Personal Insolvency Practitioners. It is anticipated that this date will be during the second quarter of 2013 and the public will be informed in advance when the ISI are ready to process such applications.

I understand that various scenarios of possible resolution outcomes for each of the three new debt arrangements will be available on the ISI's website which will be operational in due course.

Legal Services Regulation

532. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if consideration will be given to introducing an amendment to the proposed Legal Service Bill that would provide and facilitate a suitably experienced and qualified legal executive practice as a conveyancer and provide such services in their own right. [10360/13]

533. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if consideration will be given to introducing an amendment to the proposed Legal Service Bill that would enable a person who is a legal executive become a partner in a law firm. [10361/13]

534. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if consideration will be given to introducing an amendment to the proposed Legal Service Bill that would grant a right of audience in the District and Circuit Courts to persons who are legal executive. [10365/13]

535. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if consideration will be given to introducing an amendment to the proposed Legal Service Bill that would clarify the evidential status of the attestation of documents by a legal executive acting as a Commission for Oaths. [10366/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I propose to take Questions Nos. 532 TO 534, inclusive, together.

It is clear from the correspondence I have received from the Irish Institute of Legal Executives Ltd, the content of which is reflected in the four issues raised by the Deputy, that the scope of their proposals to confer legal status and a whole range of functions on such a category of persons is extensive and goes beyond those measures to be introduced under the Legal Services Regulation Bill 2011. The Bill, which has completed Second Stage in the Dáil and is awaiting Committee Stage, does not make any provision in relation to the role or status of "legal execu-

tives" nor is any such provision envisaged.

The proposals being made by the Irish Institute of Legal Executives Ltd on behalf of its members, are far-reaching and relate *inter alia* to "a right of audience in the District and Circuit Courts, before tribunals and, subject to review, subsequently in all courts", and to the eligibility of members for quasi-judicial and judicial appointments (e.g as District Court judges or as members of Tribunals). These proposals also draw heavily from the regulatory and practise models of England and Wales which do not always correspond to those of our jurisdiction nor to those set out under current Government policy in the Legal Services Regulation Bill 2011. Under Section 30 of the Bill, provision is already made for public consultation in relation to the creation of a new profession of conveyancer. It also remains open to legal executives, who are so minded, to pursue the career of solicitor or barrister by way of capitalising on their acquired legal knowledge and experience.

While recognising that there may be additional benefits and efficiencies to be found for consumers and for the legal services sector in a more developed role for "legal executives", the far-reaching proposals being made on their behalf at this time lie beyond the scope of the Legal Services Regulation Bill impinging, as they do, on aspects of the courts and the judiciary. Such matters will, therefore, need to be considered separately on their own merits, while others may come to be considered in due course by the new Legal Services Regulatory Authority.

Defence Forces Operations

536. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Defence if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the British Ministry of Defence has paid out €14 million in compensation to hundreds of Iraqis with a further 700 claims on the way and if it has implications for Irish troops serving abroad. [9821/13]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): The Defence Forces serve on Peace Support Operations as part of UN mandated missions, led by organisations such as the United Nations, the European Union or NATO. Where matters of personal injury or damage to property arise in relation to citizens of the host country, claims for compensation are made to the lead organisation, as opposed to the troop contributing nation. Recent compensation payments made by the British Ministry of Defence have no implications for Irish troops serving abroad.

Defence Forces Personnel

537. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Defence the number of retired medical officers from the Defence Forces who have been offered medical duties as locum tenens with the Defence Forces in the past ten years; the reason that a retired medical officer (details supplied) was not offered any such duties although he offered to do them; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10319/13]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): A total of 13 retired military medical officers have been engaged at various stages in the period concerned to provide general practitioner services when required in military installations. There is no obligation on the Department to engage any retired medical officer of the Defence Forces to provide medical duties and I am informed that since 2009, newly retired medical officers were engaged to provide such services only in exceptional circumstances. I should also add that against the background of the difficulty experienced in recruiting doctors to the Defence Forces, it has been necessary to identify alternative options for the provision of medical services to the Defence Forces, including the

consideration of the outsourcing of some or all Defence Forces domestic medical services. In this regard, an integrated model for the provision of the required medical services, involving both the Medical Corps and outsourced service provision, is being progressed.

Defence Forces Recruitment

538. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Defence the position regarding a place in the Defence Forces in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Carlow; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10414/13]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): The Military Authorities have advised that the named individual was successful at the interview stage of the 2012 General Service recruitment competition and was placed on the Defence Forces Training Centre panel. Unfortunately this individual was not placed high enough on the panel to be made an offer during the 2012 recruitment campaign. The general service recruitment panel will remain in place until the end of 2013 and it is intended that any recruitment in 2013 will be from those remaining candidates from the 2012 competition panel. All recruitment will be achieved within the resource envelope allocated to Defence.

Irish Red Cross Funding

539. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Defence the reasons for the recent resignation of the Honorary Treasurer of the Irish Red Cross and if issues related to the corporate governance of the IRC were involved; his views on the progress of the IRC on the reform of its corporate governance arrangements; the progress to date on new legislation regarding the Red Cross; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9537/13]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): The issue of the recent resignation of the Honorary Treasurer of the Irish Red Cross Society, who was elected to the Society's General Assembly by his local Area, and to this position by the members of the General Assembly, is entirely a matter for the Society itself. I am satisfied that over the past two years the Society has made good progress in reforming its Corporate Governance arrangements.

The Programme for Government provides for the initiation of a detailed legal review of the basis, structures and governance of the Irish Red Cross to improve its functioning in the light of changing circumstances. My Department has commenced work on the review and I anticipate that this will result in a Red Cross Act (Amendment) Bill during the lifetime of this Government.

Defence Forces Operations

540. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghaíl** asked the Minister for Defence if he will provide in tabular form the number of suspect devices that the army disposal unit has had to deal with in each of the past five years and to date in 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9958/13]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): The primary responsibility for the maintenance of law and order rests with An Garda Síochána. The Defence Forces, pursuant to their role of rendering Aid to the Civil Power (ATCP), assist An Garda Síochána when requested to do so. The Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) Teams respond when a request is made by An Garda Síochána for assistance in dealing with a suspect device or for the removal of old

ordnance. The number of times that the Defence Forces EOD teams have been deployed in the past five years and to date in 2013 is set out below.

Year	Total number of Callouts	Number of callouts for Viable Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs)
2008	180	44
2009	196	63
2010	198	53
2011	237	70
2012	209	96
2013 to date	35	21

Apart from IEDs, other types of callouts would include hoaxes, false alarms, post-blast analysis, unstable chemicals and conventional munitions destruction of old historical artillery shells.

Departmental Agencies Issues

541. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Defence if he will provide details of the payment of bonuses or other performance related payments and or allowances made to the staff of agencies under the aegis of his Department with a yearly breakdown from 2008 outlining the overall amount paid in each year period and the number of staff that received such payments and or allowances. [10162/13]

542. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Defence if he will provide details of payments made to the CEO or equivalent of all agencies under the aegis of his Department including details of any bonuses, pension entitlements or any other remuneration paid to him or her in 2012. [10179/13]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): I propose to take Questions Nos. 541 and 542 together.

The agencies associated with the Department in the period 2008 to 2012 were the Civil Defence Board, the Army Pensions Board and the Board of Coiste an Asgard. The agencies were staffed by civil servants.

No bonuses or other performance related payments and or allowances have been made to these staff since 2008.

The Civil Defence Board was identified in the Public Service Reform Plan as a body to be abolished. Legislation was passed by the Oireachtas in December 2012 for the dissolution of the Board and the transfer of its functions back to the Department of Defence. The Chief Executive Officer of the Civil Defence Board in 2012 was a serving civil servant at Principal Officer grade. The arrangements that apply to the CEO in respect of pension and expenses are the same as for all Civil Service staff.

In the context of settling the Estimates for the Department of Defence for 2010, the Government decided that the national sail training scheme operated by Coiste an Asgard would be discontinued as recommended in the Report of the Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditure. An application for voluntary strike-off was made to the Companies Registration Office in January 2013 seeking the removal of Coiste an Asgard from the Companies Register,

and the Company is expected to be officially struck off by mid 2013.

Neither the Army Pensions Board nor the Board of Coiste an Asgard has a Chief Executive Officer.

Defence Forces Recruitment

543. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Defence if the Irish Army will be recruiting more soldiers in 2013 or 2014. [10424/13]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): The Government has decided to accept my recommendation that the strength of the Permanent Defence Force will be maintained at 9,500. I believe this is the optimum strength required to fulfill all roles assigned by Government. The Military Authorities have advised that the strength of the Permanent Defence Force at 31 January 2013, the latest date for which details are available, was 9,313 comprising 7,472 Army, 790 Air Corps and 1,051 Naval Service personnel.

Following on from the 2012 recruitment campaign, 539 General Service recruits were enlisted in the Permanent Defence Force. It is intended that further general service recruitment will take place from the existing competition panel during 2013. No decisions have yet been made with regard to recruitment in 2014.

All recruitment will be achieved within the resource envelope allocated to Defence.

Defence Forces Equipment

544. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Defence the reason the Reserve Defence Forces are made to buy their own boots and water as they do not have proper equipment; the reason these forces have extra hours in 2013-2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10425/13]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): The Military Authorities have advised me that boots are issued to members of the Reserve and there is no requirement for members of the Reserve to purchase these at their own expense. Nor are Reservists obliged to purchase water for personal consumption when engaged in military duties.

The recently published Value for Money Review of the Reserve Defence Force recommended that the Regulatory criteria currently governing the classification of Reservists as effective or non-effective be reviewed. These criteria set out, amongst other requirements, the minimum hours of attendance at training activities. There is a requirement to ensure that these criteria reflect attendance requirements that are consistent with the capabilities required of the Reserve Defence Force. This may include revised hours of attendance and the Military Authorities are progressing proposals in this regard.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Payments

545. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payment of the agri environment option scheme will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9668/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): An application under the Agri-Environment Options Scheme from the person named was received in my Department on 14th November 2012.

The initial processing of the applications has been completed and acknowledgement letters have issued to all applicants. The detailed actions listed in each application are currently being recorded and all applications will be ranked and selected according to the predetermined selection criteria. This process is expected to take several weeks and letters will issue to all applicants informing them of the outcome of the selection process in due course. In the event that any queries arise on the application of the person named during this process officials in my Department will be in direct contact with the person named.

Single Payment Scheme Applications

546. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason for a decision in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Galway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9535/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Single Payment Scheme is governed by the provisions of Council Regulation (EC) No 73/2009, Commission Regulation (EC) No 1120/2009 and Commission Regulation (EC) No 1122/2009.

During the validation of the land declared by the person named in the application for the purposes of payment, it was established by this Department there was an over-claim in respect the land in question. Notwithstanding that my Department had provided a pre-printed application form for the 2012 Scheme to the person named, showing the revised reference area available on this land parcel, the person named declared an area considerably higher than was available when lodging the application.

The 2012 SPS application form and the Terms and Conditions of the Scheme made provision for the procedures to be followed by applicants, who decided to claim an area in excess of the reference area.

- **Column 5** of the application form provided that *"The claimed area in Column 7 should not exceed this area. If it does, you must complete Column 6 and supply a map or other evidence to verify the new claim."*

- **Column 6** of the application, which provided for possible changes to the reference area, states that *"If you wish to request an amendment to the Reference area of a parcel, place an "X" in this column ..."* It also states that " *Mapping of other evidence of change must be submitted to support any request under this column."*

- Column 7, which catered for the claimed area again emphasises this point by stating that *"The reference area (see Column 5) should not be exceeded without marking X in Column against this parcel and submitting maps or other evidence of a change parcel in size"*

Notwithstanding the above, the person named claimed a higher area when submitting the 2012 SPS application than that established by my Department. However, while recognising that the land was over-claimed, this Department decided to continue the processing of the application of the person named and, on completion of the validation process, to make payments without using the over-claimed area i.e. no penalty was calculated, or applied, in respect of the over-declaration.

A supplementary payment is due to the person named, following the adjustment in the reference areas of the parcels in question; this payment, which will issue shortly, will be calculated on the basis of the recognised share which the person named has in the parcels in question.

Sheep Census

547. **Deputy Derek Nolan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of flocks of sheep in County Galway that were recorded in 2012 and of these flocks, the number of female sheep that were recorded; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9547/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): There is a legal requirement on all flock owners to complete and return the annual Sheep Census form. While the closing date for the return to my Department of completed 2012 Sheep Census forms had initially been fixed for 11 January 2013, I subsequently decided to extend the closing date to 25 January 2013 in order to give farmers sufficient time to complete and return the Census, as I was particularly mindful of the additional data farmers are being asked to provide. Processing of these forms is ongoing and it will be some time yet before the statistics from the 2012 Census will become available; the Deputy will be aware that a comprehensive report is published annually, following processing of the Census returns.

For information, data from the 2011 Sheep Census for County Galway are as follows:

Number of flocks	Average flock size	Breeding Ewes over 12 months old	Rams	Other sheep	Total sheep
4,121	94	260,028	8,226	120,938	389,082

Food Labelling

548. **Deputy John Halligan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to extend the checks for horse DNA to other products which may contain beef products such as inter alia dried soups, gravy granules, dried beef products and powder mixes for casseroles, stews, bolognese and lasagne; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9567/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): DNA testing has been deployed in recent times as part of the FSAI's proactive approach to food authenticity and food fraud control programmes in this country. It was this testing which first uncovered the issue relating to mislabelling of meat that has since become a matter of concern across Europe.

In light of recent developments, officials from my Department and the FSAI met with the meat processing sector on 14th February to agree a national protocol for DNA testing of meat to be applied at retail, catering and processing level in Ireland. This testing will provide further reassurance to Irish consumers and consumers of Irish food abroad about the authenticity of ingredients in our meat based products. DNA testing will apply from now on as part of routine food testing across the country. The following categories of food are being tested – prepackaged beef products on sale to the final consumer or to mass caterers, beef products offered for sale without pre-packaging to consumers or to mass caterers and meat ingredients used in processed beef products. The results will be made known to the public. The industry has already been engaged in product testing and results received by the FSAI to date have all been negative for equine DNA (except for 5 positives which related to products previously identified

as a problem and which had already been removed from the market).

In addition, at the instigation of the EU Commission and with the strong support of the Irish Presidency, a coordinated EU plan was agreed on 15th February whereby the DNA testing of meat and meat products may commence immediately and will be co-funded by the Commission at a rate of 75 per cent for the first month. Results from the first round of tests, to be carried out by the end of March, will have to be reported to the Commission by 15th April. The number of DNA tests, which will be carried out on the basis of representative sampling, is expected to exceed 2,250 across the EU, and this will be supplemented by bute testing on the basis of one sample per 50 tonnes of horsemeat. This testing will contribute to a clearer understanding of the situation across Europe and may be extended for a further two months. As part of the EU-wide plan, 50 additional food samples will be checked for horse DNA during March in Ireland. These include products marketed or labelled as containing beef as a major ingredient such as minced meat, meat products and meat preparations. The results of these tests will also be published and will provide the basis for consideration of the need for any further action.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Payments

549. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will receive their agri environment options scheme 2 payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9568/13]

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 €1,015.23 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 have been successfully completed and 75% payment totalling €2,850.27 issued on 25th February 2013. The balancing 25% payment will issue shortly.

Rural Environment Protection Scheme Applications

550. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) in County Mayo may expect to have a their REP scheme payment processed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9570/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named commenced REPS 4 in February 2009 and received payments for the first three years of their contract.

REPS 4 is a measure under the current 2007-13 Rural Development Programme and is subject to EU Regulations which require detailed administrative checks on all applications to be completed before any payments can issue. Following the administrative check an area discrepancy was discovered between the Single Farm Payment Scheme application for 2012 and the REPS Agri-Environmental Plan which has resulted in the need for further clarification. This issue is currently being investigated with the intention of an early resolution and payment in respect of 2012.

Pásanna Capall

551. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Talmhaíochta, Bia agus Mara cén uair a dhéanfar íocaíocht faoi scéim na limistéar faoi mhíbhuntáiste do 2012 le duine (sonraí leis seo), os rud é gur chuir sé ar aghaidh 7 bpas capaill chuig an Roinn; cén uair a chuirfear na pasanna seo ar ais chuig an duine seo; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [9580/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Deimhníodh le gairid go sásaítear coinníollacha na Scéime maidir le híosleibhéal dlús stocála ar ghabháltas an té a ainmnítear, tar éis fianaise a bhí in easnamh maidir le heachaithe a fháil. Féadadh dá bharr sin an phróiseáil ar an iarratas a thabhairt chun críche agus tá íocaíocht le heisiúint go gairid leis an gcuntas bainc a ainmníodh.

Rural Environment Protection Scheme Payments

552. **Deputy Tom Hayes** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will inform a person (details supplied) in County Tipperary under what section of the agreement can payment to the herd owner under rural environment protection scheme 4 scheme be cut; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9582/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Payment under agri-environment schemes are made to compensate for income forgone and additional costs incurred by the scheme participants based on the type of commitments undertaken. In addition, an additional payment of up to 20% may be paid, where justified, based on "transaction costs" which are the costs incurred by participants in engaging with the scheme. Traditionally, this additional payment has been paid under REPS.

Given the on-going difficulties in the public finances and budgetary constraints on my Department, I have had no option but to make difficult decisions in the allocation of the funding available to many competing demands. In finalising my Department's Estimates for 2012, I announced a 10% reduction in payments under REPS 4 from 2012 onwards. I decided that the reduction would be implemented by way of a cut to the transaction cost of participating farmers of from €28.03 to €5.60 on each hectare on which the a transaction cost was paid. The 2012 payment of the person named was adjusted accordingly. This resulted in a 2012 REPS 4 payment totalling €5,211.52, which issued to the person named in January 2013. Because of the particular circumstances of the person named, this represents a 7.9% reduction when compared to the 2011 payment which totalled €5,660.12.

Afforestation Programme

553. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payment of a RDP afforestation grant will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9591/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): A premium payment form (Form 4) has been received from this applicant by the Forest Service. This application is currently being processed for payment in the annual premium payment run and it is intended that this annual payment run will be made in early April 2013.

Harbours and Piers Expenditure

554. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will prioritise funding for pier improvement works at a location (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9593/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Renard Pier is owned by Kerry County Council and responsibility for its repair and maintenance rests with the Local Authority in the first instance.

My Department provides funding for the development and repair of Local Authority owned piers and slipways as part of the Fishery Harbour and Coastal Infrastructure Development Programme.

In the context of the 2013 Programme, which is currently under consideration, I invited coastal Local Authorities, including Kerry County Council, to submit applications in order of priority for qualifying projects. Kerry County Council did not submit an application for funding of works at Renard Pier for 2013.

Any application submitted by Kerry County Council in respect of Renard Pier under the Capital Programme in future years will be given consideration based on Exchequer funding and overall national priorities.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Payments

555. **Deputy Noel Coonan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a disadvantaged area payment will be finalised in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Tipperary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9601/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The holding of the person named has recently been confirmed as having met the minimum stocking density requirements of the Scheme, following receipt of all outstanding evidence relating to equines on the holding. This has enabled processing of the application to be finalised, with payment issuing directly to the nominated bank account on 19 February 2013.

Harbours and Piers Expenditure

556. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will confirm if he is planning to introduce pay parking charges in Howth Fisheries Harbour County Dublin at a rate of €8 per day even though local residents, community, marine and business groups are all strongly opposed to the introduction of such charges; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9628/13]

557. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will provide details of the cost benefit analysis undertaken in relation to his plans for pay parking charges in Howth, County Dublin; if he will indicate the estimated total revenue accrued on an annual basis from his proposed introduction of pay parking charges in comparison with the potential reduction in visitor numbers and the serious negative knock-on effects for the local economy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9629/13]

558. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will provide more information on the alleged safety and emergency concerns that his Department is aware of in relation to current car parking in Howth Harbour, County Dublin; the person who raised these concerns with his Department; and if he will make a statement on the

matter. [9630/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 556 to 558, inclusive, together.

As I have said a number of times recently in response to previous questions, Howth Fishery Harbour Centre is first and foremost a working fishery harbour. It is one of 6 Fishery Harbour Centres operated by the State, each of whose primary purpose is to provide facilities and services for the fishing industry and fisheries-related activities.

There has been significant capital investment in the Fishery Harbour Centres in recent years, underpinning both the fisheries side and, in parallel, their expanding use for leisure and marine tourism and other maritime enterprises. Howth in particular has a long tradition in both areas. All of the users of the Fishery Harbour need to be accommodated in a safe and secure facility, and the Department has a duty of care towards anyone entering it. Apart from any other considerations, the upkeep of the Harbour so that it meets with current health and safety standards has a cost and this cost must be paid for out of the income generated.

In the current economic climate, the State must be fully committed to maximising the return on its investment. Furthermore, my Department is required to ensure that the Fishery Harbour Centres are run on a financially sound basis.

With over 500 parking spaces within the boundaries of the Fishery Harbour Centre at present, it is clear that a significant source of revenue exists that could assist in balancing the books, and providing funding for enhancements that would not otherwise be possible.

I am reviewing all aspects of the matter at present. I can assure the Deputy that the views of the various harbour users, the potential earnings, the possible impact on the harbour businesses and recreational users, the impact on the local economy, the impact on overall traffic management within the Fishery Harbour, are all matters that I will take into account in coming to a decision.

Afforestation Programme

559. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding an afforestation application in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9640/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The application for pre-planting approval submitted by the person named is located within a Special Protection Area (SPA) designated for the protection of the hen harrier. Because of restrictions that apply to planting and other developments within this designated area, it is not possible to approve the application to plant.

Any future afforestation within the SPA must take into account the results of recent Hen Harrier breeding and distribution surveys, the availability of suitable habitat, existing forest cover, age profile of existing forests, and the effects of other cumulative developments on hen harrier populations e.g. wind farms.

The National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) of the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht is in the process of developing a Threat Response Plan (TRP) for the conservation of Hen harriers. Forestry will form a significant element of the plan, particularly in relation to overall forest restructuring. Pending the completion of the TRP and forestry components

therein, my Department is not in a position to make a determination on the potential impact of afforestation projects on Hen harriers within the SPA and is not, therefore, in a position to approve any afforestation projects within the SPA at this time. My Department is working with NPWS in the development of the TRP which will determine the circumstances in which further afforestation, if any, might be accommodated in Hen harrier SPAs without impacting on the conservation of the species.

An Scéim Íocaíochta Aonair

560. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine cén uair a dhéanfar íocaíocht faoi scéim na limistéar faoi mhíbhuntáiste agus scéim na haoníocaíochta le duine (sonraí leis seo); an mbíonn pionós i gceist i gcás gach scéime acu sin; agus má bhíonn, cén méid pionóis a bhíonn i gceist [9655/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Maidir leis an Scéim Íocaíochta Aonair, bhí an t-iarratas ar cheann de roinnt iarratas a roghnaíodh lena scrúdú i ndáil le hinghlacthacht d'fhonn coinníollacha de chuid an AE a shásamh. Ba é toradh na cigireachta sin go bhfuarthas go ndearnadh rómhaíomh idir 3% agus 20% i ndáil leis an achar, agus laghdaíodh an íocaíocht, faoi rialacha agus coinníollacha na Scéime, dá thoradh sin. Cuireadh laghdú iomlán €281.99 i bhfeidhm i ndáil leis an rómhaíomh. Eisíodh íocaíocht €1,110.39 i ndáil leis an achar inghlactha ar an 7 Feabhra 2013 leis an gcuntas bainc a d'ainmnigh an t-iarratasóir. Cuireadh toradh na cigireachta in iúl don iarratasóir i litir dar dáta an 1 Feabhra 2013 chomh maith le heolas faoin gceart athbhreithniú ar an gcinneadh a lorg. Is féidir achomharc a dhéanamh in am tráth leis an Oifig Achomharc Talmhaíochta, atá neamhspleách, maidir le toradh an athbhreithnithe.

Faoi Scéim na Limistéar faoi Mhíbhuntáiste 2012, éilítear go mbeadh coinníoll maidir le híosleibhéal dlús stocála 0.15 aonad beostoic á sásamh ar ghabháltas iarratasóirí inghlactha ar feadh tréimhse coinneála sé mhí as a chéile, chomh maith le cloí le meánleibhéal bliantúil 0.15 aonad beostoic arna ríomh ar feadh dhá mhí dhéag bhliain na scéime. Ó tharla nach bhfuil deimhnithe gur sásaíodh íoschoinníollacha na scéime maidir le dlús stocála ar ghabháltas an té a ainmnítear, níl aon íocaíocht dlite faoi Scéim na bliana 2012.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Payments

561. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) in County Galway will be paid their 2012 disadvantaged area scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9656/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Under 2012 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme, the holdings of eligible applicants were required to have met a minimum stocking density of 0.15 livestock units for a retention period of six consecutive months, in addition to maintaining an annual average of 0.15 livestock units calculated over the twelve months of the scheme year.

As my Department has not, to date, received any evidence of livestock on the holding concerned, no payment is due.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Payments

562. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payment under the agri-environment options scheme will issue in respect of a person (details supplied); the reason for the delay in issuing this payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9657/13]

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 1st September 2011.

Under the EU Regulations governing the Scheme, a comprehensive administrative check of all applications, including cross-checks with the Land Parcel Identification System, must be completed before any payment can issue. An outstanding query in relation to one commonage parcel has now been satisfactorily resolved and I expect payment for 2011 to issue shortly to the person named.

Payments in respect of the 2012 Scheme year are subject to a similar administrative checking process which includes verification of capital investments through checks on receipts. These checks have now been completed and following the payment for 2011, the payment in respect of 2012 will be finalised.

Rural Environment Protection Scheme Payments

563. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payment under REP scheme and the disadvantaged area scheme will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Galway; the reason for the delay in issuing these payments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9658/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named commenced REPS 4 in March 2008 and received payments for the first four years of their contract.

REPS 4 is a measure under the current 2007-13 Rural Development Programme and is subject to EU Regulations which require detailed administrative checks on all applications to be completed before any payments can issue. Following the administrative check an area discrepancy was discovered between the Single Farm Payment Scheme application for 2012 and the REPS Agri-Environmental Plan which has resulted in the need for further clarification. This issue is currently being investigated with the intention of an early resolution and payment in respect of 2012.

Rural Environment Protection Scheme Payments

564. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payment under REP scheme for 2012 will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Galway; the reason for the delay in issuing this payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9659/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named commenced REPS 4 in June 2009 and received payments for the first three years of their contract.

REPS 4 is a measure under the current 2007-13 Rural Development Programme and is subject to EU Regulations which require detailed administrative checks on all applications

to be completed before any payments can issue. Following the administrative check an area discrepancy was discovered between the Single Farm Payment Scheme application for 2012 and the REPS Agri-Environmental Plan which has resulted in the need for further clarification. This issue is currently being investigated with the intention of an early resolution and payment in respect of 2012.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Applications

565. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will invetsigate a derogation case in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9678/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named is one of a number of applicants under the 2012 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme, whose cases are impacted by the requirement of a minimum stocking density of 0.3 livestock units per forage hectare in 2011. My Department wrote to all concerned applicants in August 2012 giving them the opportunity to seek derogation from this requirement.

To date, my Department has no record of receiving an application for derogation in this case. Arrangements have been made for the reissue of this application form to the person concerned.

Food Labelling

566. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans, if any, to improve labelling regulations so that consumers can be assured that they are purchasing what it says on the pack, and that labelling provides a detailed breakdown of the species of meat in meat products; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9679/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Current food legislation, including Directive 13/2000, requires species labelling on meat products sold to the consumer. In addition, beef labelling regulations require detailed traceability and labelling of fresh cuts and pure mince at the retail level. In 2011, the European Union passed a new Council Regulation on Food Information for the Consumers (FIC) Regulation, No.1169/2011, which has updated the requirements for consumer information and labelling in a number of areas: country of origin or place of provenance including the origin labelling for meats other than beef; list of ingredients; quantitative indication of ingredients; minimum durability; use by date; date of freezing; substances or products causing allergies or intolerances; font size; etc. Many of these new requirements will have to be implemented by way of EU Commission Implementing Regulations and will come into force at the end of 2014.

While the Department of Health is the lead department in relation to food labelling, my Department together with the Department of Health and the Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI) attend regular meetings of the Working Group on this legislation in Brussels which is currently discussing the mandatory origin labelling of fresh meat from species other than beef, voluntary origin labelling of foods and the mandatory origin labelling of meat as an ingredient. A report on this and other matters is to be submitted by the Commission to the FIC Working Group by 13 December 2013. The question of origin labelling of meat as an ingredient was discussed at the Council of Agriculture Ministers meeting yesterday, which I chaired. The Commission agreed to expedite the completion of its report.

Food Quality Assurance Scheme

567. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to extend the food quality assurance scheme beyond the farm gate to include the food processing and packaging industries; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9680/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Quality Assurance Schemes already extend beyond the farm gate as vertical industry integrated schemes have been developed by Bord Bia over a number of years. These Schemes operate in the beef, pigmeat, eggs, lamb, poultry products and horticulture sectors and currently include over 150 participating food processors and packers as well as over 40,000 farmers. The products are available in the major supermarkets and many retail outlets. The standards of the individual Schemes have been developed and refined over a number of years in consultation with scientists, academics and independent experts on issues such as food safety, animal health and welfare, care for the environment etc. Each Scheme is accredited to IS EN ISO 9001:2008 with the National Standards Authority of Ireland and to the European Standard EN45011. These measures underpin ongoing commitment to quality and sustainability as well as to the highest standards of traceability and food safety in the Irish food sector.

Food Imports

568. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the value and range of meat products, including horse meat, imported each year for the past two years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9683/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The following table, drawn from the official CSO Trade Statistics gives a breakdown of meat imports into Ireland in 2012 and 2011.

	2011		2012	
Category of Meat	€ 000	Tonnes	€ 000	Tonnes
Poultry	284,092	85,998	326,909	99,187
Pigmeat	214,044	79,027	243,634	81,983
Beef	158,459	46,240	150,054	40,032
Sheepmeat	14,230	3,444	18,384	3,668
Other Meat & Meat Produce	40,739	12,193	38,700	11,331
Including, Meat of Horses, Asses, Mules of Hinnies	0	0	5	0*
Grand Total	711,564	226,902	777,681	236,201

* The weight of product is too low to feature in official statistics

Food Safety Authority Investigations

569. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if, following a request from the Food Safety Authority of Ireland to his Department on the 21 of

December 2012 to obtain samples of raw ingredients from two meat processing plants implicated in the adulteration of food products with horse meat, this matter was brought to his attention and to the attention of the Department of Health who has responsibility for food safety; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9686/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): As I indicated in my detailed statement on this matter to the Joint Committee on Agriculture, Food and the Marine on 5th February, the finding of 29% equine DNA in a burger first became available to the Food Safety Authority of Ireland on 11th January and was made available to my Department on 14th January. Up to that point there was no basis for any action. My Department was requested on 21st December by the FSAI to obtain samples of raw ingredients in the context of the FSAI survey on the authenticity of meat products, preliminary results of which indicated traces of non-bovine DNA. My Department was requested by the FSAI not to take any other action as results were inconclusive and required further evaluation by the FSAI. In this context the FSAI has pointed out that where trace levels are detected this is indicative of inadvertent rather than deliberate presence and not requiring declaration on the product label. It is and always has been standard practice that preliminary results are subject to a process of confirmatory testing.

Having regard to the range of sampling activity taking place at any given time, the lack of any public health concern, the inconclusive nature of the results and the trace level findings, the request of the FSAI on 21st December 2012 to obtain samples of raw ingredients was not regarded as approaching the priority level at which it would be appropriate that it be brought to my attention. When the FSAI provided my Department with actual results including the 29% finding for the first time on 14th January 2013 it was brought to my attention. I understand from the Department of Health that the FSAI notified that Department of its request to obtain samples on 21st December 2012. It stressed, however, that there were no public health concerns and that no further action was required at that time.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Payments

570. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 847 of 16 January 2013, when payment of the agri environment option scheme will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9689/13]

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 €909.15 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 have been successfully completed and full payment totalling €3,601.80 issued in respect of the 2012 scheme year – 75% payment issued on 14th February and the balancing 25% payment issued on 18th February 2013.

Grocery Industry Competition

571. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the work being carried out for his Department to establish the proportion of the margin on the sale of meat and dairy products that are going to the retailer, the processor and the producer respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9705/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): While I obviously consider it essential that profits in the production chain are distributed equitably the matter raised is primarily one for my colleague the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise & Innovation. I would point out, however, that the Programme for Government contains a specific commitment to enact legislation to regulate certain practices in the grocery goods sector. The Government intends to give effect to this commitment by including an enabling provision in the legislation currently being prepared to merge the National Consumer Agency and the Competition Authority, which will allow for the introduction of a statutory Code of Practice. Work on drafting the Consumer and Competition Bill is on-going and the Bill is included in the "A list" in the Government's current Legislative Programme. It is important to point out that in introducing a statutory Code the intention is not to protect one stakeholder over another nor is the Code intended to prevent stakeholders such as retailers and suppliers from engaging in the type of contractual negotiations that happen in most other sectors of the economy. It is also the case that the Code is not seeking in any way to determine the price of grocery goods. Rather, the essential value of the Code is that by regulating problematic practices in the grocery goods sector it seeks to strike a fair balance between the competing interests of the various stakeholders including the interests of the end user, the consumer.

The Government is strongly of the view that it important to ensure there is balance in the relationship between the various players in the grocery goods sector and that Ireland continues to have strong agri food and retail sectors, particularly given the importance of these sectors to the national economy. The introduction of a Code of Practice, as provided for in the Programme for Government, is intended to achieve such a balance taking into account the interests of all stakeholders in the grocery goods sector. It must also be noted, however, that arrangements in the domestic market are not the primary influence on farmers' incomes. Unsurprisingly, with an Agri-Food industry that exported over €9bn of goods last year, the bulk of most Irish farmers' produce is exported (e.g. 4 out of 5 beef cattle produced in Ireland are consumed in other countries), so EU and world prices have a much bigger influence on the price farmers receive for their output overall than does the retail price in Ireland.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Payments

572. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when the agri environment options scheme 1 payment will be made available to a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9710/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named was approved for participation in the Agri-Environment Options Scheme with effect from the 1st September 2010 and full payments totalling €608.11 and €4,195.14 issued in respect of 2010 and 2011 respectively. 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. The application was also selected for a Cross Compliance inspection which resulted in a penalty of 20% being imposed. Officials in my Department are finalising the application of the person named on this basis with the intention of issuing payment for the 2012 scheme year as soon as possible.

Single Payment Scheme Payments

573. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding single farm payment for 2012 in respect of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9713/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Any monies recouped from the first moiety of the Single Farm payment in question have been refunded to the person named. A refund of €6,917.38 was made on 14 February and a refund of the remaining balance of €58.10 was made on 26 February. With regard to the outstanding debt associated with this payment, no repayment proposal has been received by my Department to date.

Single Payment Scheme Payments

574. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if an application under force majeure for a single farm payment has been examined in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny. [9724/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department is currently reviewing the 2006 to 2010 applications of the person named, specifically, the eligibility under the above Schemes of two land parcels owned by him. These parcels were also declared by another party during the above years. My Department is investigating the matter and corresponding with the parties concerned to establish the eligibility of these parcels. As soon as this review is completed, the person named will be informed, in writing, of the outcome.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Applications

575. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a decision has been made in relation to a derogation appeal lodged by a person (details supplied) in County Mayo; if not, when the decision is likely to be made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9730/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): While the person named successfully applied for derogation in regard to the 2011 stocking density aspect of the 2012 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme, payment has not issued as the holding does not satisfy the 2012 Scheme minimum stocking density requirements. My Department has been in direct contact with the advisor of the person named to clarify the matter.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Applications

576. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if all payments due to a person (details supplied) in County Limerick will issue without further delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9733/13]

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 1st September 2011 and has received full payment totalling €1,167.51 in respect of 2011. Under the EU Regulations governing the Scheme, a comprehensive administrative check of all applications, 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 investments through checks on receipts. During the course of these checks on the capital investment claim a query was identified and a letter issued to the person named dated 30 January 2013 regarding this query. A reply to this query has been received and is being dealt with by my Department at present. Once resolved, the application will be further processed with the intention of issuing payment for 2012 at the earliest opportunity.

Rural Environment Protection Scheme Payments

577. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding a rural environment protection scheme 4 payment in respect of a person (details supplied) and if he will expedite the matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9810/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named commenced REPS 4 in February 2009 and received payments for the first three years of their contract. REPS 4 is a measure under the current 2007-13 Rural Development Programme and is subject to EU Regulations which require detailed administrative checks on all applications to be completed before any payments can issue. The administrative checks in this instance have been completed and the 75% Year 4 payment amounting to €3391.99 issued to the person named on 18th February 2013. The remaining 25% Year 4 balancing payment will issue shortly.

Single Payment Scheme Eligibility

578. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if applicants who are over the age of 40 years can still receive the single farm payment if they are not currently in receipt of this payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9818/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Under the current Single Payment Scheme the National Reserve caters for new entrants to farming regardless of age, provided they meet certain educational and income criteria. Under the commission proposals for the CAP post 2013 similar arrangements will continue to apply.

Natural Heritage Areas Designation

579. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 627 of 29 January 2013, if he will provide clarity regarding the terms NHA and proposed NHA designation in respect of the lands (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9835/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The basic designation for wildlife is the Natural Heritage Area (NHA). This is an area considered important for the habitats present or which holds species of plants and animals whose habitat needs protection. Proposed NHAs (pNHAs) were published on a non-statutory basis in 1995, but have not since been statutorily proposed or designated. These designations do not fall under the scope of the Rural Development Plan and are not designations that attract payment under European Regulations. Boylesgrove Wood is designated pNHA and is not eligible for payment

under REPS 4.

Rural Environment Protection Scheme Applications

580. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason for the delay in processing a rural environment protection scheme 4 grant in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9841/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named commenced REPS 4 in January 2008 and received payments for the first four years of their contract. REPS 4 is a measure under the current 2007-13 Rural Development Programme and is subject to EU Regulations which require detailed administrative checks on all applications to be completed before any payments can issue. These checks are currently nearing completion in this case and I expect the outstanding 2012 payment to issue shortly.

Fish Landings

581. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his policy in relation to the landing of fish caught at sea by non-Irish vessels at Irish ports; the steps being taken to encourage more vessels to land catches at Irish ports; the regulations currently in place including SFPA inspections; the changes that have been made to these regulations recently that have resulted in a reduction in the number of non-Irish vessels landing fish here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9856/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Some 1.2 million tonnes of fish are caught in the waters around Ireland on an annual basis but at present, only approximately 200,000 tonnes of this is landed into Ireland. An Bord Iascaigh Mhara is working to address this issue, particularly as oil prices increase and the cost of sending trawlers full of fish to Spain, France, Scotland and Norway becomes less economical. With the increase in the Blue whiting quota for 2013, it is anticipated that there will be increased levels of this stock landed into Ireland by foreign vessels. I understand that negotiations are ongoing between representatives of the French fishing industry and Irish processing interests, with a view to increasing French landings into Ireland. A pilot initiative was developed between BIM, Irish processors and French industry during late 2012. All concerned are seeking to build on the success of this initiative in 2013.

In relation to official controls carried out by the SFPA these are done in order to discharge Ireland's obligations under the Framework for the control of the Common Fisheries Policy in EU Waters as set out in Council Regulation (EC) No 1224/2009, establishing a Community control system to ensure compliance with the rules of the CFP and Council Regulation (EC) No 1005/2008 establishing a Community system to prevent, deter and eliminate illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. Detailed rules for the implementation of the control regulation are set out in Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) No 404/2011, and I have implemented these in national law through Statutory Instrument 320 of 2012 as amended. This is the regulatory EU framework against which the SFPA carries out its inspection regime.

These regulations contain an explicit default obligation requiring that all fish be weighed by operators at the point of landing. In order to ensure a reasonable balance between the burden of compliance and the practicalities of fish landing, SFPA has pursued and achieved approval for landings to Ireland to avail of various derogations. These allow, in particular for a sample

weighing at landing, or a weighing after transport to an Irish premises. In the case of landings to a Member State for transport to another Member State before weighing, the EU Regulation is prescriptive in only allowing that to occur under the terms of a Common Control Programme agreed between the landing MS and the weighing MS. I am pleased to inform you that due to active engagement by the SFPA with their French counterparts as part of overall pursuit of a level playing field for fisheries control, the EU Commission has approved the Common Control programme between Ireland and France, and anyone landing to Ireland may transport their fish directly to France for weighing, provided they work within the terms of this approved CCP. The SFPA have engaged in a specific compliance programme including active dialogue with industry stakeholders, with view to discharging Ireland's obligations in this regard.

At the request of the industry, I have recently added Castletownbere to the list of Irish ports at which third country landings can be processed and this is aimed to facilitate an increase in landings of Blue Whiting into Ireland by the Norwegian fleet. This is contained in S.I 367 of 2012 Sea-Fisheries (Illegal, Unreported And Unregulated Fishing) (Amendment) Regulations 2012.

Afforestation Programme

582. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding further afforestation at a location (details supplied) in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9870/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Mullaghareirk is located within a Special Protection Area (SPA) designated for the protection of the hen harrier where restrictions apply to planting and other developments. Any future afforestation within the SPA must take into account the results of recent Hen Harrier breeding and distribution surveys, the availability of suitable habitat, existing forest cover, age profile of existing forests, and the effects of other cumulative developments on hen harrier populations e.g. wind farms.

The National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) of the Department of Arts Heritage and the Gaeltacht is in the process of developing a Threat Response Plan (TRP) for the conservation of Hen harriers. Forestry will form a significant element of the plan, particularly in relation to overall forest restructuring. Pending the completion of the TRP and forestry components therein, my Department is not in a position to make a determination on the potential impact of afforestation projects on Hen harriers within the SPA and is not, therefore, in a position to approve any afforestation projects within the SPA at this time. My Department is working with NPWS in the development of the TRP which will determine the circumstances in which further afforestation, if any, might be accommodated in Hen harrier SPAs without impacting on the conservation of the species.

Departmental Offices

583. **Deputy Michael McNamara** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to close the District Veterinary Office in Limerick and any other District Veterinary offices to the public; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9915/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department is currently reviewing the administrative support for its 16 Regional Offices and, in particular, the centralisation of this support in one or more centralised office(s). Centralising ad-

ministrative procedures would enable my Department to reduce the number of administrative staff it requires to support District Veterinary Office operations and, accordingly, the cost of providing its services. The administrative functions for Cork have been recently centralised in Cork city and the administrative functions in the Limerick DVO will be transferred to Naas with effect from 4th March, front office presence will remain. It has also been decided to transfer the administrative functions out of the Tipperary Regional Office to Cavan. The centralisation of administrative functions in other regional offices will be considered in light of the availability of opportunities to redeploy the staff concerned to support other critical public services. There are no plans for the closure of any of the 16 Regional Offices to the public in the context of this review.

Single Payment Scheme Payments

584. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will provide a breakdown of the number of farmers receiving €50,000 in single farm payment in County Clare; the number receiving below €5,000 per year. [9962/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Of the farmers in Co Clare, 31 were paid 2012 Single Farm Payment of over €50,000, while 2,540 were paid less than €5,000.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Appeals

585. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payment under the 2012 disadvantaged area scheme will be issued to a person (details supplied) in County Mayo; the reason for the delay in issuing this payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9963/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named is one of a number of applicants under the 2012 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme, whose cases were impacted by the requirement of a minimum stocking density of 0.3 livestock units per forage hectare in 2011 and who applied for and were refused derogation in this regard. The applicant subsequently availed of the option to appeal to the independently chaired DAS Appeals Committee. The Committee is currently adjudicating on this appeal and the person named will be notified of the outcome, in writing, once this adjudication is completed.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Payments

586. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a 2012 disadvantaged area scheme payment will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10026/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The holding of the person named has recently been confirmed as having met the minimum stocking density requirements of the Scheme, following receipt of outstanding evidence relating to sheep on the holding. This has enabled processing of the application to be finalised, with payment due to issue shortly to the nominated bank account.

Importation of Fertilisers

587. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the composition of imported fertilisers have been scientifically tested; the frequency with which this testing is carried out; and the last time such testing was carried out. [10038/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Ireland does not have a fertiliser manufacturing industry and, therefore, all inorganic fertilisers used are imported. A risk based annual programme of sampling is prepared which sets out the number of samples of various types of fertiliser that are to be taken at various fertiliser blending facilities and ports. These samples are taken by Authorised Officers of my Department and are analysed by the State Laboratory, in accordance with the appropriate accredited laboratory methods. In 2012, 111 samples of such fertilisers were taken and in excess of 300 analyses for nutrient composition were undertaken. Sampling and testing of fertilisers primarily takes place in Spring and Winter (to coincide with imports and blending) and is ongoing at present.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Appeals

588. **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. [10055/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named is one of a number of applicants under the 2012 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme, whose cases are impacted by the requirement of a minimum stocking density of 0.3 livestock units per forage hectare in 2011 and who applied for and were refused derogation in this regard. The person named subsequently submitted additional information to my Department which showed that this requirement had been satisfied, thereby allowing processing to be recently finalised. Payment will shortly issue to the nominated bank account.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Payments

589. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payment under the 2012 disadvantaged area scheme will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10090/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The holding of the person named has recently been confirmed as having met the minimum stocking density requirements of the Scheme, following processing of the 2012 Sheep Census. This has enabled processing of the 2012 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme application to be finalised, with payment due to issue shortly to the nominated bank account.

Agricultural Colleges Data

590. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will provide details in tabular form, by college and course, the number of students who attended agricultural colleges in each of the years 2006 to 2011; if he will provide details for each college of the number of teaching personnel for those years; and if he will make a statement on

the matter. [10092/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Under the Agricultural (Research, Training and Advice) Act, 1988, Teagasc has responsibility for the provision of education and training services to the agricultural sector. These services are delivered through a network of agricultural colleges, regional education centres and in collaboration with three privately-owned colleges. Within the various colleges and at local level, Teagasc provide a wide range of courses in agriculture, horticulture, equine studies and forestry. It is a matter for Teagasc to prioritise activities in the delivery of education and training services and to allocate resources in accordance with these priorities.

I understand from Teagasc that the data is not readily available in the format requested. They have agreed to assemble the data, and on receipt, I will arrange for it to be forwarded to the Deputy.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Appeals

591. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a decision has been made on a disadvantaged area scheme appeals committee in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10114/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The holding of the person named has recently been confirmed as having met the minimum stocking density requirements of the Scheme, following receipt of outstanding evidence relating to sheep on the holding. This has enabled processing of the application to be finalised, with payment issuing to the nominated bank account on the 14 February, 2013.

Agriculture Schemes Payments

592. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if all the land that has no entitlements currently were to be taken into account, what would be the average single farm payment per ha; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10146/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The 2010 SPS database, which my Department has used to model various CAP reform proposals, shows an average payment per hectare of €272. If all land declared for which farmers did not hold Single Payment Scheme entitlements were included, the average payment per hectare would be reduced to €265.

Departmental Agencies Staff Remuneration

593. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will provide details of the payment of bonuses or other performance related payments and or allowances made to the staff of agencies under the aegis of his Department with a yearly breakdown from 2008 outlining the overall amount paid in each year period and the number of staff that received such payments and or allowances. [10158/13]

594. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will provide details of payments made to the CEO or equivalent of all agencies under the

aegis of his Department including details of any bonuses, pension entitlements or any other remuneration paid to him or her in 2012.## [10175/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 593 and 594 together.

Queries on bonuses, other performance related payments and allowances to staff in the State Bodies should be directed to the State Bodies themselves.

The details of the salaries of the Chief Executive Officers of the twelve State Bodies operating under the aegis of my Department for 2012 are outlined in the table below. In relation to two Commercial State Bodies – Coillte and the Irish National Stud - the salaries of the Chief Executive Officers are paid from the companies own resources as they do not receive funding from my Department. No bonuses were paid to Chief Executives of State Bodies under the aegis of this Department in 2012.

Body/Agency	2012
Non-Commercial	
Aquaculture Licensing Appeals Board	This Board does not have a CEO. A Higher Executive Officer in my Department is Secretary to the Board
An Bord Bia	Salary €160,082Bonus €0
Bord Iascaigh Mhara	Salary €129,512Bonus €0Benefit in Kind €4,212
Marine Institute	Salary €146,221Bonus €0
National Milk Agency	Salary €85,600Bonus€0
Sea Fisheries Protection Agency	€15,918 Chairman of SFPA held this position for 2 months of 2012.Bonus €0
Teagasc	Salary €160,082Bonus €0
Veterinary Council of Ireland	The salary of the Chief Executive Officer is on par with that of a Principal Officer
Commercial	
Bord na gCon	Salary €162,917Bonus €0Pension €37,004Other €15,264Total €215,185
Coillte	Salary €265,252Bonus €0Pension €78,015Other €27,352Total €370,619
Horse Racing Ireland	Salary €191,000Bonus €0Pension €48,000Other €8,000Total €247,000
Irish National Stud	Salary €133,419Bonus €0Pension €30,250Car Allowance €24,000Total €187,669

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Appeals

595. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a decision has been made on a disadvantaged area scheme appeals committee in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10201/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named is one of a number of applicants under the 2012 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme, whose

cases are impacted by the requirement of a minimum stocking density of 0.3 livestock units per forage hectare in 2011 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 22 February 2013. As advised in the letter, it is open to the person named to pursue the matter with the Office of the Ombudsman.

Live Exports

596. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will provide an update in the renewed trade of live cattle to Libya. [10217/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): A shipment of 2882 cattle from Ireland is currently en route to Libya. While I understand that further trade with Libya is likely, this is a commercial matter and not one in which my Department has any direct involvement.

Single Payment Scheme Payments

597. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason a person (details supplied) in County Cork has yet to be paid their 2008 single farm payment; if he will make arrangements for immediate payment of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10219/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Under the terms and conditions of the Single Payment Scheme, an applicant, as well as meeting the Scheme criteria, is required to comply with EU regulatory requirements relating to cross compliance in the areas of public, animal and plant health, environment and animal welfare.

In this case, application by the person named under the Single Payment Scheme is currently being reviewed arising from an earlier investigation which lead to prosecution and conviction under animal disease and identification legislation. The applicant will be notified of the outcome of this process, including details of any outstanding monies due following application of any penalties arising, as soon as possible. Following this, the applicant will have available the normal right of access to the internal review process and, if necessary, to the independent Agriculture Appeals Office.

Sheepmeat Sector

598. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on current sheep prices; the work that he is doing to improve prices; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10222/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The market performance of the sheep sector, in common with other agricultural sectors, is a function of supply and demand. I am aware that sheep prices for the year 2013 to date are disappointing for producers and are running at around 17% below the 2012 level for the corresponding period. This decline is reflected also in other EU member states and can be attributed to a number of

factors including increased imports from New Zealand and the impact of austerity in Europe on demand generally. However, I would like to put the current difficulties in context.

After successive years of decline, 2011/12 saw an important turning point for the Irish sheep industry. It was a period when confidence grew on the back of incremental growth in the national breeding flock. This brought about increased throughput at farm and processing level. During that same period Irish sheep exports delivered double digit growth and retail sales of Irish lamb have grown steadily. These developments are in sharp contrast to other Member States, where sheep meat production and domestic consumption have been falling.

Throughout 2012 a higher demand from both the domestic and export markets were evenly matched with supplies, particularly during the peak periods of hogget and main season lamb supply. Slaughterings in 2012 were up 12%, or 260,000 head to 2.43 million sheep. This included 68,000 extra hoggets, 160,000 extra lambs and 32,000 additional ewes and rams slaughtered in 2012.

On another positive note, exports of Irish sheep meat registered a solid performance in 2012 where total value rose by 7% to €205 million. Seventy percent of our production was exported, the vast majority of which was destined for the EU market. Just over 42,000 tonnes were exported to over 24 individual markets across the globe in 2012. France and the UK continue to be our core export markets representing three quarters of our volume exports. Strong increases in shipments were recorded to Belgium, Germany and Sweden as exporters continue to secure new business and grow volume with existing customers. Despite the ongoing pressure on retail meat sales in Ireland, lamb held its own, with data from Kantar Worldpanel showing a rise of almost 4.5% for the 52 week period ending November 2012.

Tighter global supplies that characterised the sheepmeat markets in 2011/12 have eased slightly as global production edges up 1% to 13.6 million. Good pastures and favourable lambing conditions in Australia and New Zealand have reversed four years of declining output. Production in both countries is forecast to grow by 3-5% this year. Due to the ongoing austerity in Europe and with an increase in the availability of cheaper lamb from the southern hemisphere, in comparison with 12 months ago, the price differential between New Zealand and EU lamb has been widening since summer 2012. The carryover of UK hoggets into 2013 has also put downward pressure on prices in the early months of 2013.

Today's consumer seeks value and is prepared to switch to a cheaper protein option. Lamb is perceived as a relatively expensive meat and Bord Bia promotion campaigns play an important role in positioning lamb as a preferred choice. Increasing the frequency of purchase of Irish lamb and encouraging shoppers to look for the Bord Bia Quality Mark on-pack when shopping will be the key objective of the Bord Bia 2013 lamb promotions. Promotional activities will include radio advertising, which will be undertaken around Easter, announcing the arrival of early season lamb amongst consumers. Similarly, a series of promotional activities to include PR, publicity and in-store activities will be undertaken to coincide with peak availability of new season lamb. The TV advert highlighting the unique flavour of Irish lamb due to our ideal climate will play a central role in our 2013 promotions.

Overall numbers of lamb producers in the Bord Bia Lamb Quality Assurance Scheme (LQAS) stand at just over 9,300, which roughly equates to 45% of our national throughput. I recently launched the Sheep Technology Adoption Programme (STAP), which I believe will be a key element in driving the ambitious target for the sheepmeat Sector in Food Harvest 2020. The STAP is intended to provide participants with the knowledge and the skills necessary to improve on-farm technical efficiency in a number of key areas. The sheep sector is a key part of the Agrifood sector, especially in marginal land areas and there is huge scope to improve farm

incomes through focusing on issues such as grassland management, financial management, breeding, health and welfare and environmental efficiency. The STAP provides an opportunity to grow the membership base of the LQAS amongst lamb producers, while also promoting the adoption by farmers of best practice in the various aspects of sheep farming. I have allocated €3 million to the STAP for 2013, with a maximum payment of €1,000 per participant. Though the Grassland Sheep Scheme was due to expire at the end of 2012, I decided to extend it for another year and am providing some €14 million for this purpose in 2013. The scheme will be funded from unspent Single Farm Payment funds. I am also providing for a continuation of the sheep fencing scheme in the amount of €3 million this year to enable many farmers in the sheep sector to complete the necessary investment works in order to maintain competitiveness and introduce increased efficiencies on their farm and so secure the future of their enterprises. I am confident that all of these initiatives will be of significant assistance in developing a strong and sustainable sheep sector for the future.

Agriculture Schemes Payments

599. **Deputy Paul J. Connaughton** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the total number of farmers in the beef technology scheme in County Galway yet to be paid; if his attention has been drawn to an issue in relation to data inputting which appears to be causing a problem and which is putting farmers under severe pressure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10240/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Under Food Harvest 2020, ambitious development targets were set for a number of agricultural sectors, including the beef sector. In this context, €5m of Exchequer funding was made available in 2012 for the establishment of a Beef Technology Adoption Programme (BTAP) to encourage the adoption of best management practice on beef farms.

In order to qualify for the 2012 Beef Technology Adoption Programme, applicants were required to have satisfied one of the following criteria:

- Farmers with suckler cows must be current participants in the Suckler Cow Welfare Scheme (AWRBS), that is, they must have received payments under the Scheme on 2010 born calves **and** have applied to participate in ICBF HerdPlus prior to applying for the Programme.

- Beef farmers without a suckler herd must have applied to participate in ICBF HerdPlus prior to applying for the Programme. Any farmer finishing animals to slaughter must have applied for membership of the Beef Quality Assurance Scheme (BQAS) before the application date for this Programme and must be a member of the scheme by 31 October 2012. He/she must also have finished a minimum of 15 cattle to slaughter in 2011.

Nationally, 5,685 applicants satisfied the entry requirements, 731 of which were from County Galway. In addition to the entry criteria, however, applicants were also required to attend a minimum of five Discussion group meetings/approved National Events and successfully complete two Tasks, selected from a menu of eight Tasks. Of the 731 Galway Programme participants, 164 are currently not paid. All unpaid cases are being reviewed and, where eligibility is confirmed, payment will issue; those confirmed as unsuccessful will be advised accordingly, in writing. In common with all Schemes/Programmes operated by my Department, those who are found to be unsuccessful will be afforded the right of appeal.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Payments

600. **Deputy Áine Collins** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when he expects payments to be made to successful applicants of the 2013 agri-environment options scheme. [10321/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): An application under the Agri-Environment Options Scheme from the person named was received in my Department on 14th November 2012.

The initial processing of the applications has been completed and acknowledgement letters have issued to all applicants. The detailed actions listed in each application are currently being recorded and all applications will be ranked and selected according to the predetermined selection criteria. This process is expected to take several weeks and letters will issue to all applicants informing them of the outcome of the selection process in due course. In the event that any queries arise on the application of the person named during this process officials in my Department will be in direct contact with the person named.

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 (LPIS), must be completed before any payment can issue. I expect that this process will be undertaken with a view to commencing payments to the successful applicants towards the end of the year.

Meat Processing Plant Inspections

601. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will restore the inspection levels at meat processing plants to 2010 levels; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10416/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The onus of compliance with EU food safety regulations, including traceability requirements, rests in the first instance with food business operators. My Department maintains a permanent presence in approved slaughter plants. Regular visits are made to other Department approved meat plants. The frequency of these inspections in plants other than slaughter plants, which focus primarily on food safety requirements, is determined by a risk assessment, as required under EU legislation, which is conducted for each plant. My Department has been able to reduce the number of inspections at non-slaughter meat plants, where there is no permanent supervisory presence, by moving to a more robust and rigorous targeted system of official controls, based on the risk assessments mentioned above. Official controls and inspections levels are monitored independently by the EU Food and Veterinary Office and by the FSAI under service contract.

Food business operators in Ireland are responsible inter alia for carrying out checks to ensure that their ingredients come from approved plants. In meat plants that operate under the supervision of the Department, official controls are conducted on these checks to verify their effectiveness. An annual audit of imported products is carried out in each Department approved meat plant. The audit includes physical identity, labelling and documentary checks. This includes product originating both in EU Member States and third countries. Labelling and documentary checks also form part of the routine checks conducted by Department officials.

Under the Department's National Residue Programme, and including tests on bovine samples carried out by processors, up to 30,000 samples taken at farm and factory level and covering a wide range of food stuffs are tested annually. These tests relate to microbiological and chemical standards, their primary focus being on food safety. These are fully in accordance with

EU testing requirements.

In addition the Product Official Sampling and Testing (POST) programme is a microbiological testing programme on samples taken from Department approved ready-to-eat food, meat product, minced meat and meat preparation plants i.e. added value plants. This is part of the official verification of food safety controls in the plants concerned as provided for in Regulations (EC) 852/2004, 854/2004 and 2073/2005. A total of 1,600 samples are taken annually and the sampling and testing is risk based.

The number of inspections has not been found to be inadequate as compliance with existing food safety and food hygiene requirements was not an issue in relation to the mislabelling of meat products uncovered by the recent FSAI survey. It is clear however that the focus of checks henceforth will also need to include food authenticity and the EU wide programme of DNA testing recently agreed will provide the basis for consideration of future action in this respect.

In the meantime, in the light of recent developments, officials from my Department and the FSAI met with the meat processing sector on 14th February to agree a national protocol for DNA testing of meat to be applied at retail, catering and processing level in Ireland. This testing will provide further reassurance to Irish consumers and consumers of Irish food abroad about the authenticity of ingredients in our meat based products. DNA testing will apply from now on as part of routine food testing across the country. The following categories of food are being tested – pre-packaged beef products on sale to the final consumer or to mass caterers, beef products offered for sale without pre-packaging to consumers or to mass caterers and meat ingredients used in processed beef products.

Agriculture Schemes Payments

602. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) in County Cavan will be paid their funding under the animal welfare scheme farm discussion group for 2012; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10421/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): In order to qualify for the 2012 Beef Technology Adoption Programme, applicants were required to have satisfied one of the following two criteria:

- Farmers with suckler cows must be current participants in the Suckler Cow Welfare Scheme (AWRBS), that is, they must have received payments under the Scheme on 2010 born calves **and** have applied to participate in ICBF HerdPlus prior to applying for the Programme.

- Beef farmers without a suckler herd must have applied to participate in ICBF HerdPlus prior to applying for the Programme. Any farmer finishing animals to slaughter must have applied for membership of the Beef Quality Assurance Scheme (BQAS) before the application date for this Programme and must be a member of the scheme by 31 October 2012. He/she must also have finished a minimum of 15 cattle to slaughter in 2011.

Following validation of the application of the person named, it was established that he did not meet either of the qualifying criteria outlined above and he was advised of this position by letter dated 30 May 2012.

Foster Care Policy

603. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if grandparents generally have any right to have some level of access to their grandchildren who are in foster care arrangements in circumstances where the children's parent is deceased; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10152/13]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Foster Care Agencies

604. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghaíl** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will detail the accredited adoptive agencies handling inter country adoptions in 2010, 2011, 2012 and 2013; the level of State funding provided to these agencies together with the number of inter country adoptions completed by each agency; the number of adoptions anticipated by each agency; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9782/13]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Since the commencement of the Adoption Act, 2010, in November 2010 three agencies have been accredited by the Adoption Authority to facilitate intercountry adoptions: ARC, Family Bridge Adoptions and Helping Hands Mediation Agency. To date there have been no adoptions entered on the register of intercountry adoptions in relation to these agencies. The Adoption Authority advises that ARC expects to receive the first referrals from Bulgaria shortly and Helping Hands hopes to commence its intercountry adoption programme with Vietnam in the coming months.

In 2011 ARC was awarded €230,000 in National Lottery Funding from my Department. The HSE has not funded ARC to date. Family Bridge Adoption has not received any State funding to date.

Helping Hands received €5,000 in National Lottery Funding from my Department earlier this year to cover costs associated with travel required to conclude the necessary accreditation process. In addition, the HSE has funded Helping Hands to the order of €280,000 for 2010, €205,170 for 2011 and €190,000 for 2012 .

A number of issues in relation to accredited agencies are being examined by my Department in consultation with the Adoption Authority and the HSE; however, no decision in relation to future funding of accredited agencies has been made.

Early Child Care Education Issues

605. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will examine the operation of the early childhood care and education scheme which allows payment for three hours a day for tuition but nothing for planning the practical detail and implementation of the curriculum for the children; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9899/13]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme was introduced in January 2010 and provides for one free pre-school year for all eligible children in the year before commencing primary school. The Government has made a very significant commitment in maintaining the pre-school year on a universal and free basis despite the current budgetary situation. The universal nature of this programme is critical for childhood development by providing every child with early learn-

ing and preparation for school.

The objective of the ECCE programme is to make early learning in a formal setting available to eligible children in the year before they commence primary school. Services participating in the programme are required to promote age-appropriate activities and programmes. The payment made to a service is for the provision of services, including preparatory and supportive work such as engagement with parents, training and organisation.

Issues relating to workforce development, curricular support and capitation, will be considered as part of Ireland's first-ever Early Years strategy, work on which is at an advanced stage.

Early Child Care Education Issues

606. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will consider re-instating the choice for parents of extending the early childhood care and education scheme to 50 weeks; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9901/13]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme was introduced in January 2010, and a number of transitional measures were included to make it more acceptable to the childcare sector. One of these measures related to the number of weeks over which the free pre-school year could be provided. At that time, approximately 30% of children in the relevant age-cohort were in full daycare. Therefore, in order to facilitate full daycare services in the early years of the programme, services were permitted to choose between providing a 38 week or a 50 week model.

I should emphasise that the ECCE programme is designed as an educational programme for children. It was always intended, once the programme had bedded-down, to introduce a standard 38 week model. This is primarily because this is the optimal model in terms of ensuring a high-quality early years experience for pre-school children. The Síolta and Aistear frameworks were developed to support this objective. The ECCE programme is designed to be delivered across 38 weeks. It is difficult to see how the curriculum can be delivered across a 50 week period when the children spend less time (generally 2 hours 15 minutes per day) availing of it.

My focus is on improving the quality of childcare services. For this reason, therefore, services participating in the ECCE programme are now required to provide the programme on the basis of 3 hours per day, 5 days per week, over 38 weeks. It is not mandatory that children attend every day but, where they do not, the capitation fee is reduced accordingly.

The change to the 38 week model only was introduced in September 2012 and all participating services have successfully made the transition to the new arrangement. There are no proposals to re-introduce the 50 week model.

Child and Family Support Agency Remit

607. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the position regarding the family resource centre programme (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [9932/13]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Government has approved the Heads of the Child and Family Support Agency Bill and has also agreed to the priority drafting of this Bill. The necessary legislative and organisational preparations are being prioritised so that the Agency can be established as soon as possible. The Agency, upon

establishment, will assume full statutory responsibility for a range of child and family services currently provided by three separate agencies; namely the HSE, the Family Support Agency and the National Educational Welfare Board.

The Government's consideration of these matters was informed, by the content and recommendations of the Report of the Task Force on the Child and Family Support Agency which I published in July 2012. The Task Force considered that the Agency needs to be as broadly based as possible and should include a range of prevention, early intervention, family support and therapeutic care interventions. It is my intention that the Agency will have a role in supporting families and communities. I can assure the Deputy that the new Agency will build on the excellent work undertaken by the Family Support Agency over the last decade, and that a community based approach will form an integral part of the new Child and Family Support Agency.

Funding of over €23.5 million has been provided to the Family Support Agency (FSA) for 2013. This includes a dedicated provision of over €14 million in respect of the Family Resource Centre Programme in 2013. Under the programme some 106 Family Resource Centres will receive funding from the FSA this year. The FSA, like all other State bodies, has been asked to make savings across all the programmes which it administers. In this context the Family Resource Centres have been asked to focus, in particular, on identifying the scope for greater efficiency and for reduction in the administration and overhead costs associated with the day-to-day running of the centres.

The composition of the Board of the Child and Family Support Agency is currently under consideration. It will reflect the broad ranging nature of the Agency's responsibilities. In line with best corporate governance, the criteria for Board membership will be focused on ensuring that Board members have the requisite mix of experience and competencies needed to steer such a large organisation providing a diverse range of personal services.

The establishment of the new Agency and the wider transformation of children's services represents one of the largest, and most ambitious, areas of public sector reform embarked upon by this Government.

Adoption Records Provision

608. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghaíl** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of persons that have registered with the National Adoption Contact Preference Register since its inception; the number that have been matched; the percentage of birth parents that registered the following preferences, willing to meet, exchange of letters or information or contact by phone, no contact but willing to share medical information, no contact but willing to share some information, no contact at the moment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10093/13]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The National Adoption Contact Register (NACPR) was established in 2005 to assist adopted people and their natural families to make contact with each other, exchange information or state their contact preferences. Applicants decide, through a range of information and contact options, how they wish to proceed. It is intended that the Adoption (Information and Tracing) Bill 2013 will provide for placing the National Contact Preference Register on a statutory basis. I hope to submit the draft Heads of Bill to Cabinet for approval shortly.

At the end of 2012 there were 7224 adopted people and 3165 natural relatives registered

with the NACPR. Just over 600 "matches" in total have been generated, i.e. over 600 adopted persons have been matched with one (or more) natural relatives. In 2012 the Information and Tracing Unit processed 542 new applications to join the Register, which resulted in 54 "matches".

The Authority advises that around 80% of the natural relative applicants are parents, around 10% of them choose to have no direct contact, but may be willing to exchange some information. A majority of those choose to be discretely informed if a "matching" application was received and some of those changed their contact option when subsequently informed that a match had occurred. The Authority advises that people can, and do, change their minds about the type and extent of contact that they want and the Authority are happy to amend their applications accordingly.

The Adoption Board published a review of the operation of the Register from 2005 to 2007 in November 2007. This review contains detailed information about the register and is available on the Information and Tracing section of the Authority website,www.aai.gov.ie.

Departmental Agencies Staff Remuneration

609. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will provide details of the payment of bonuses or other performance related payments and or allowances made to the staff of agencies under the aegis of her Department with a yearly breakdown from 2008 outlining the overall amount paid in each year period and the number of staff that received such payments and or allowances. [10160/13]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The information requested by the Deputy is not held in my Department. I have asked my officials to liaise with the agencies under the aegis of my Department to obtain this information and to forward it to you shortly.

Departmental Agencies Staff Remuneration

610. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will provide details of payments made to the CEO or equivalent of all agencies under the aegis of her Department including details of any bonuses, pension entitlements or any other remuneration paid to him or her in 2012. [10177/13]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The information requested by the Deputy is not held in my Department. I have asked my officials to liaise with the agencies under the aegis of my Department to obtain this information and to forward it to you shortly.

Adoption Legislation

611. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will review adoption legislation to ensure that it meets with international standards including the standards laid down in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in particular Articles 7, 8 and 20 and the European Convention on the Adoption of Children (Revised) 2008; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10216/13]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The standards referred to by the Deputy relate primarily to a person's right to an identity. Work is ongoing on the Adoption (Information and Tracing) Bill, which will address this matter with regard to adoption. The proposed Bill will provide for a structured and regulated approach to providing access to adoption information and will facilitate contact for those affected by adoption, including in circumstances where an adoption order was not effected.

It is intended that the Bill will provide for the Adoption Authority to have access to all adoption records. The Bill will provide for a National Index of Adoption Records to be maintained by the Adoption Authority containing information as to where all known adoption records are located within the State. It is envisaged that only the Authority, the HSE and accredited bodies will hold adoption records, with the Authority having overall charge of those records.

It is also intended that the Bill will provide for placing the National Contact Preference Register on a statutory basis. The purpose of the Register is to allow persons affected by adoption to register their names with a view to receiving information about a person from whom they have been separated as a result of adoption and will allow for registering a preference, as to whether or not, they want to have contact with that person.

A National Tracing Service will be established, the operation of which will be subject to guidelines which will be set out in regulations. It is intended that the Tracing Service will be made available to adopted persons, birth parents and relatives with the Adoption Authority having the overarching responsibility for the service.

It is intended that prior to the release of adoption information, counselling will be offered by the Adoption Authority, the HSE or by an accredited body to an adopted person, a birth parent or to an adoptive parent if, in the opinion of the Authority, the HSE or an accredited body, such counselling would be beneficial in the circumstances, or if such counselling is requested by the applicant seeking the adoption information.

Complex issues have arisen during the course of the preparation of the Bill including the criteria for balancing an adopted person's right to information about his or her identity as against a birth parent's right to privacy. My own view is that persons affected by adoption should be provided with as much information as possible within permissible Constitutional boundaries.

Consideration of legal and policy issues is ongoing and once these have been satisfactorily resolved, I intend to seek Government approval to publish the Heads of Bill. It is my intention to bring this Bill before the Houses of the Oireachtas in the coming months.

Adoption Legislation

612. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she has met with the Adoption Rights Alliance; the proposals which she will support in respect of amendments to existing adoption legislation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10223/13]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I have met with the Adoption Rights Alliance. In addition, I have received detailed submissions from the group which outline suggested amendments to the Adoption Act, 2010 and proposals in relation to information and tracing for those affected by adoption.

I am currently examining a number of proposals in relation to amendments to the Adoption Act, 2010. I intend to bring forward any changes to the legislation in conjunction with the draft

Adoption (Information and Tracing) Bill 2013, which I propose to bring before the Oireachtas in the coming months.

Child and Family Support Agency Remit

613. **Deputy Seamus Healy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will review her decision to move psychology services out of the Health Service Executive and into the new Child and Family Support Agency and consider an alternative proposal where psychology services remain in primary care with contractual arrangements with the Child and Family Support Agency; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [10313/13]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Arising from the Government's consideration and decision with regard to the range of functions to be discharged by the new Child and Family Support Agency, it was agreed that an impact analysis be jointly developed by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and the Department of Health regarding 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 is being undertaken as a priority.

I have 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.

Food Safety Authority Investigations

614. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health if the Food Safety Authority of Ireland was responding to a tip-off when it tested for horse DNA in certain foods in November 2012; the number of times in 2012 the FSAI tested for horse DNA in foods prior to November 2012; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9770/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI), as part of their monitoring and surveillance programme on labelling of foods, conducted a small survey in November 2012 to investigate the authenticity of meat products and, specifically, to check on the type of animal species in meat products. There was no tip off involved. This was simply routine work similar to that done in the past with other foods, such as Cod. Prior to November 2012 the FSAI had not tested for horse DNA.

Food Safety Promotion Board

615. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the overall budget in 2013 of Safefood, and the contribution to that budget by his Department. [9771/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The overall budget of the Food Safety Promotion Board/Safefood in 2013 will be €8.5m, pending approval of their business plan for 2013 by the North/South Ministerial Council. As the agreed contribution level is 30:70 North/South, it is expected that my Department's contribution to their budget will therefore amount to €5.95m.

Hospital Waiting Lists

616. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the reasons for the delay in receiving an appointment at Tallaght Hospital for urgent medical treatment in respect of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 22. [9829/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): In relation to waiting list management in general, the National Waiting List Management Policy, *A standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, January 2013*, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, recently been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists. In relation to this particular query raised by the Deputy, I have asked the Health Service Executive to investigate the situation and respond directly to the Deputy in this matter.

Symphysiotomy Report

617. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Health if he is prepared to amend the law on the statute of limitations to accommodate the survivors of symphysiotomy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10113/13]

643. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health when he expects to make the Walsh Report on symphysiotomy available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9672/13]

675. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Health the up-to-date position regarding his Departments dealings with survivors of symphysiotomy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9833/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 617, 643 and 675 together.

My first priority is to ensure that the women who have had a symphysiotomy have their health needs comprehensively and professionally met. In this regard, the HSE provides a range of services to women who continue to suffer the effects of having had this procedure. These services include the provision of medical cards, the availability of independent clinical advice and the organisation of individual pathways of care and the arrangement of appropriate follow-up.

My Department has commissioned an independent research report in relation to the practice of symphysiotomy in Ireland. The research included a consultation process involving patient groups, health professionals and in particular the women who have experienced symphysiotomy. The researcher is currently finalising the report based on the consultation and it is also planned to have a peer review process. It is hoped that the report will be published early in 2013.

It is intended that the awaited report will inform the Government's overall consideration of this matter, including the consideration of any actions or legal implications that may be required. It would be premature for me to make any other comments at this stage on what actions might be taken, prior to giving full consideration to the recommendations of the report.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Applications

618. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health if a review of the rate of contribution being paid to the Health Service Executive nursing home support scheme will be carried out in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry. [9540/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): Where an applicant is being provided with financial support under the scheme, the HSE may either at its own initiative or at the request of the applicant carry out a review. A person's financial assessment can only be reviewed, at their request, if 12 months have passed since the initial financial assessment or the most recent review, or if the HSE is satisfied that there has been a material change to the person's financial circumstances. As this is a service matter it has been forwarded to the HSE for direct reply.

Mental Health Services Funding

619. **Deputy Anne Ferris** asked the Minister for Health the total budget for mental health services for County Wicklow; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9573/13]

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

Health Services Provision

620. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Health the cost to the State per client resident in boarding out houses operating under the jurisdiction of Health Service Executive Mayo for each year over the past five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9577/13]

621. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Health the number of boarding out houses that operate under the jurisdiction of Health Service Executive Mayo and the number of clients that are resident in these facilities for each year over the past five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9578/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): I propose to take Questions Nos. 620 and 621 together.

As these are service matters they have been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Air Ambulance Service Provision

622. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health his plans for air ambulances here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9581/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): As the Deputy will be aware, there is a significant cost associated with providing aeromedical support to emergency services. In the Irish context, there is no existing data to establish what that cost might be or the level of need for such a service.

The absence of data for aeromedical support in the Irish context indicated the need for a pilot project, in order to assess the type and extent of service, if any, that might be required to

support the National Ambulance Service (NAS). In cooperation with my colleague Alan Shatter, Minister for Justice, Equality and Defence, the Emergency Aeromedical Service, was initiated as a trial service in June of 2012, to gather this information and it will run for 12 months.

In current conditions, it is prudent to maximise the use of state resources wherever possible. Accordingly, the trial project is being operated from within existing resources. It involves the Irish Air Corps providing aeromedical support to the NAS, from Custume Barracks, Athlone, with flight and maintenance personnel. The NAS is responsible for patient care, which is provided by advanced paramedics. Assessment of the trial will inform future policy direction, and in the event that a decision is made to provide this type of service, how best to proceed operationally.

Departmental Reports

623. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health when a copy of the Public Nursing Home Units review will be made available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9594/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): My colleague, Mr James Reilly T.D., Minister for Health asked the Health Service Executive to review the status of its long stay residential units, with a view to formulating proposals for future provision. Additional work is needed before this exercise can be completed and a set of proposals presented to the Minister for consideration.

Nursing Home Services

624. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide figures in relation to the cost of care in public nursing home units; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9595/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The cost of care in every public nursing home in the State is published on the HSE's website at http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/Find_a_Service/Older_People_Services/nhss/costhse.pdf. Revised cost of care figures will be published by the HSE shortly.

Hospital Waiting Lists

625. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health when an appointment for a scan at Tullamore Hospital, County Offaly will be approved in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Laois; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9602/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): Improving access to outpatient services is a key priority for the Government. Building on work already undertaken by the HSE, the NTPF has now taken over the reporting of outpatient waiting time data. For the first time, clear and comprehensive data is available on www.ptr.ie. The collation and analysis of outpatient waiting time data in a standardised format will reveal the distribution of long waiters across all hospitals. In the first instance, this will allow the SDU and NTPF to target their resources towards those patients who are waiting longest and ensure that they are seen and assessed. A maximum waiting time target has now been set of 12 months for a first time outpatient appointment by 30 November 2013.

In parallel with reducing the numbers of longest waiters, the SDU will also work with the HSE Clinical Programmes to reform the structure, organisation and delivery of outpatient services to ensure that the right patient is seen and assessed by the right health professional at the right time.

In relation to the particular query raised by the Deputy, as this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy in this matter.

Hospital Staff Issues

626. **Deputy Anne Ferris** asked the Minister for Health the number of medical internships made available by the Health Service Executive National Recruitment Service for uptake in 2012; if all eligible Irish medical graduates received medical internship places within the public health system in 2012; if all Irish medical graduates did not receive internships, if he will identify the number of places that were awarded to Irish, EEA and non-EEA applicants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9606/13]

627. **Deputy Anne Ferris** asked the Minister for Health the number of medical internship places to be made available within the Health Service Executive in 2013 for newly graduated medical doctors; if he will identify the number of stage 1 applications received for intern training posts for 2013/2014 from Irish, EEA and non-EEA applicants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9607/13]

628. **Deputy Anne Ferris** asked the Minister for Health if priority is or will be given to eligible Irish graduate applicants should there be insufficient places to facilitate all eligible applicants in 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9608/13]

685. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health his views on reports that due to the increased number of medical school graduates this year it is anticipated that in July 2013 there will be a shortage of intern places for both EU and non EU graduates of Irish medical schools. [9939/13]

716. **Deputy Paul J. Connaughton** asked the Minister for Health his plans to address the deficit of intern places for medical graduates; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10237/13]

736. **Deputy Gerald Nash** asked the Minister for Health the number of medical students that are expected to graduate here this year; the number of intern places that will be available within the Health Service Executive for these graduates; the contingency plans that are in place to meet any potential shortage of intern places; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10286/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 626 to 628, inclusive, 685, 716 and 736 together.

The issue of an adequate number of intern places in the Irish medical system is a priority for my Department and for the HSE. The intern year is an integral part of medical training and a medical practitioner cannot be fully accredited without it. Under the provisions of the Medical Practitioners Act 2007 it is a matter for the HSE to assess, on an annual basis, the number of intern training posts required by the health service.

There were 572 intern posts available in Ireland for the July 2012 intake, an increase of almost 70 posts since 2007. All 2012 EU graduates from Irish medical schools who sought an

intern post here that year and met the HSE eligibility criteria were successful in securing a post. Indeed, to date there have been sufficient posts for all EU graduates from Irish medical schools and a number of additional posts for some non-EU applicants.

My Department is in regular contact with the HSE in relation to the issue of intern places with the aim, in so far as is possible, of providing a sufficient number of intern places for Irish/EU graduates from Irish medical schools. It should be noted that under EU law intern posts must be open to graduates from other EU countries and the HSE has no control over the numbers applying.

The Higher Education Authority has indicated that the number of medical graduates this year has not yet been finalised. However, the application process for internships commencing in July 2013 closed in November last. A total of 960 eligible applications were received, 652 from EEA applicants and 308 from non-EEA applicants. There is no separate figure available for Irish applicants. The final numbers that will proceed to the first round match have not yet been determined as the overseas candidates must pass the entrance test; meet the HSE English language requirements; provide a Basic Life Support (BLS) certificate; and pass their final year medical exams. Candidates applying from within Ireland must provide a BLS certificate and pass their final year medical exams.

The HSE will have approximately 80 additional posts available for interns commencing their training in July 2013. In total there will be in the region of 650 places available for 2013 and the HSE consider that there will be sufficient capacity and funding to ensure that every EU graduate of the six Irish medical schools can access an internship this year.

Primary Care Services Provision

629. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the competition issues that have arisen with regard to the introduction of universal primary care; the discussions that have taken place with other Government Departments and agencies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9609/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): The Programme for Government provides for significant strengthening of primary care services to achieve Universal Primary Care (UPC) with the removal of cost as a barrier to access for patients. In order to deliver on this commitment, the preparation of a new General Medical Services (GMS) contract with GPs will be required. The Department and the HSE are currently examining the changes that need to be made to the GMS contract to facilitate the introduction of Universal Primary Care.

In 2007, the Department received legal advice that both European Union and national Competition law preclude the fees payable to self employed health professionals being settled on a negotiated basis.

In August 2011, following contacts initiated by the Minister for Health, the Competition Authority advised on what the Irish Medical Organisation (IMO) can and cannot do under Competition law. The IMO can, for instance, negotiate non-fee related elements of the contract. It can also present the views of GPs in the course of consultations on the contract, including matters relating to fees. Competition law does, however, preclude the IMO from organising collective action by GPs, including collective withdrawal or boycotts, in order to force the State into paying more than it is willing to pay for GP services. The key issue is that the Minister makes the final decision on what the State will pay under the contract.

I have recently had discussions with the IMO during which I outlined the Government's policy in relation to free GP care. I intend to engage in further discussions with the IMO once the legislation regarding the extension of free GP care is published.

Primary Care Centres Provision

630. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide a progress update on each of the 35 primary care centres announced under the infrastructure stimulus package in July 2012; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9610/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): Of the 35 primary care centres announced under the infrastructure stimulus package in July 2012, approximately 20 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 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. While it is not possible, at this time, to give start and completion dates for any of the individual 20 potential locations, the best estimate is that these primary care centres will be completed by late 2016.

Primary Care Strategy

631. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide details of the resource allocation model being used for the development of primary care teams; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9611/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): The implementation of the Primary Care Strategy is a priority for this Government. The objective is to develop services in the community which will give people direct access to integrated multi-disciplinary teams of general practitioners (GPs), nurses, physiotherapists, occupational therapists and others.

At the end of December 2012, there were 426 Primary Care Teams operating, i.e. holding clinical team meetings, involving GPs and HSE staff. The 426 Teams provide services for almost 4 million of the population with 2,636 HSE staff members and over 1,692 GPs participating. The HSE's 2013 National Service Plan commits to having 484 operational Teams in place by the end of this year. An allocation of €20 million is set aside in the HSE's 2013 National Service Plan for approximately 250 Primary Care posts to strengthen primary care services. The posts will be filled using the Resource Allocation model, based on deprivation and need, which was developed by the HSE's National Primary Care Office and Health Intelligence Unit. Using this model, the HSE completed a detailed analysis of the numbers and distribution of public health nurses, registered general nurses, occupational therapists, physiotherapists and speech and language therapists. The analysis revealed considerable variation across the 17 Integrated Service Areas in ratios of health care professionals to population, and to population numbers in areas of high deprivation. Based on this analysis, it proposed that the following additional posts be recruited to Primary Care Teams:

- 70 Public Health Nurses;

- 37 Registered General Nurses;

- 51 Occupational Therapists;

- 46 Physiotherapists;

- 47 Speech & Language Therapists.

It is the firm intention to have these posts filled as soon as possible in 2013.

Hospital Trusts

632. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health when he will publish the International Evidence Review on Independent Hospital Trusts undertaken by the Health Research Board at his Department's request; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9612/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): A literature review of Independent Hospital Trusts was requested from the Health Research Board by my Department in 2012 to inform policy development. It formed part of a wider review of academic literature in the preparation of the forthcoming report on the establishment of hospital groups. It is being further considered by my Department as its findings are relevant to related policies such as the future development of Hospital Trusts and the role of regulation in the future health system. With regard to publication, the Deputy will be aware that it is regarded as best practice for academic articles and reviews to undergo peer review prior to publication. It is anticipated that the literature review of Independent Hospital Trusts will go through this process and will be published in due course.

Hospital Trusts

633. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if, in view of the fact that Scotland and New Zealand, countries of similar population to Ireland, have experienced difficulties with independent hospital trusts, he considers this to be an appropriate model to follow here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9613/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): In preparing the Report on the Establishment of Hospital Groups as a Transition to independent Hospital Trusts, consideration was given to a wide breadth of international and national academic literature and reviews on relevant issues such as hospital reform, quality healthcare provision, financial management of healthcare, academic health linkages and organisational reform. As part of this work, cognisance was taken of the findings of the comparative review carried out by the Health Research Board (HRB) of independent hospital trusts in a number of countries and the factors identified as contributing most to successful trusts. These considerations, and the comprehensive consultation process undertaken with stakeholders, have informed the development of recommendations on the formation of specific groups and arrangements for the management and governance of all groups. These recommendations have been considered and endorsed by a Strategic Board composed of representatives with national and international expertise in health service delivery, governance and linkages with academic institutions.

Lessons learnt from other jurisdictions as well as the learning gained from the operation of the hospital groups will be taken on board in creating the legislative framework for hospital trusts here. The intention is, of course, that the trusts and the reformed health system within which hospital trusts will operate will be designed in a way that best suits Irish requirements and this will be done in a way that seeks to avoid difficulties encountered in other jurisdictions.

Health Care Infrastructure

634. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the role he sees for the market in the provision of health care here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9614/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The Irish health care system has been based on a mix of public, voluntary non-for-profit and private provision for many years. Part of the debate about the future of our health system overall has been about the most appropriate role for the private sector, and the balance to be drawn between it and the public and voluntary sectors. The Government is committed to the continued development of a mixed health care system in Ireland, drawing on the strengths of all three sectors. That said, we are committed to the development of a single-tier health service, in which the distinction between 'public' and 'private' patient is removed. We can no longer accept a situation where patients can queue-jump because they can afford to pay for faster access.

Within this context, I believe that the free market has an important role to play, provided that the system is regulated effectively to protect quality and to control costs. For example, private hospitals play an important role in delivering acute services in Ireland, and private companies also deliver community based services, such as home supports for older people. The move to Universal Health Insurance will involve a very important role for the private sector, in which health insurers will compete for business in a manner designed to drive efficiencies and offer customers choice between funders of health care. While the overall approach to reform will be informed by the experience of other countries and best practice the system as a whole will be uniquely Irish. Whatever the precise configuration of services as between public, voluntary and private, and whatever the exact role of a regulated free market within the system, my priority is to ensure that all patients and clients receive the best possible service for the lowest cost, in the setting that is most appropriate to their needs. The reform of our health system will be developed on these principles.

Primary Care Centres Provision

635. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 1052 of 16 January 2013, if he will confirm the exact date in June 2012 that the development of a primary care centre at Deanrock, Togher, Cork City, was added to the public private partnership list and to confirm the person who made this decision. [9624/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): Delivery of healthcare infrastructure is a service matter. Therefore your question has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Cancer Screening Programmes

636. **Deputy Robert Dowds** asked the Minister for Health his views on the statement in the BreastCheck programme's annual report for 2011 that sustainability of the programme's current level of service at the current resource levels in the long term is unlikely. [9637/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): I welcome the publication by the HSE's National Cancer Screening Service of the BreastCheck Programme Report for 2011-2012. The report outlines the significant advances that have been made by BreastCheck in recent years and demonstrates the contribution that the continued investment in screening has made to outcomes such as improving cancer survival rates. Breast cancer survival is now estimated at 80.7% (2004-2007), up from 75.1% (1998-2002).

The health services continue to experience very significant budgetary challenges alongside increased demands for services. The savings targets to be achieved by the HSE are required in order to meet the Government's fiscal targets. However, the BreastCheck Programme Report acknowledges that while there are challenges in the context of limited resources, the National Cancer Control Programme and the National Screening Service are committed to the continued provision of a world-class breast screening programme, which delivers a reduction in mortality from breast cancer for women in Ireland.

In addition, my Department commissioned an Efficiency Review of the BreastCheck Screening Programme in order to prepare for the age extension of BreastCheck to women up to the age of 69 years, as provided for in the Programme for Government. The review makes a number of recommendations on how the screening process could be enhanced to increase the number screened. My Department will continue to work with the HSE to ensure that national priorities and Programme for Government commitments are met.

Health Services Staff Issues

637. **Deputy Robert Dowds** asked the Minister for Health the number of radiographers employed by the Health Service Executive in each region for the past four years for which data is available. [9638/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The number (WTE excluding career break) of radiographers of all types, employed by the Health Service Executive in each region of the HSE for the past four years, is set out in the table.

	31/12/2009	31/12/2010	31/12/2011	31/12/2012
Dublin Mid-Leinster	331.02	325.37	323.01	322.79
Dublin North-East	215.51	231.04	217.63	212.13
National	6.54	67.55	63.72	61.13
South	212.13	211.04	210.82	205.52
West	201.55	196.66	188.86	192.11
Total	966.75	1013.66	1004.04	993.68

'National' in the table above refers to services provided on a national basis, for example the Breast Check programme.

Health Services Provision

638. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Health if he will examine the application for orthotics in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9642/13]

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.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Applications

639. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Health if he will examine the fair deal application in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9648/13]

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

Medical Card Eligibility

640. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health when he plans to provide medical cards to persons on the long term illness scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9663/13]

668. **Deputy Peter Mathews** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide an update in relation to the provision of free general practitioner care; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9800/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): I propose to take Questions Nos. 640 and 668 together.

The Programme for Government commits to reforming the current public health system by introducing Universal Health Insurance with equal access to care for all. As part of this, the Government is committed to introducing, on a phased basis, GP care without fees within its first term of office. Primary legislation is required to give effect to the Government commitment to introduce a universal GP service without fees. Legislation to allow the Minister for Health to make regulations to extend access to GP services without fees to persons with prescribed illnesses is currently being drafted by the Office of the Attorney General and the Department and it will be published shortly. Implementation dates and application details will be announced in due course. An annual budget of €15 million was provided for the first phase of the roll out of GP care without fees.

Services for People with Disabilities

641. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the support available in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 9. [9666/13]

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.

Smoking Ban

642. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the reason there is a clamp down on designated smoking areas in pubs as this has an impact on jobs. [9667/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): Smoking is prohibited in most enclosed workplaces under section 47 of the Public Health (Tobacco) Acts, 2002 and 2004. Environmental health officers have had enforcement powers to inspect premises and ensure that they are in compliance with the legislation since its commencement in 2004. As the Deputy is aware, the work place ban was introduced to protect third parties such as workers, from the ill-effects of

exposure to second-hand smoke. The World Health Organisation Report on the Global Tobacco Epidemic, 2009 - Implementing Smoke Free Environments, noted that smoke free environments result in either a neutral or positive impact on businesses including the hospitality sector.

Question No. 643 answered with Question No. 617.

Food Safety Authority Investigations

644. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health the date on which he has first made aware of the adulteration of processed food products with horse meat; the action he took on foot of this notification; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9681/13]

645. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health the date on which his Department was first made aware of the possible adulteration of processed food products with horse meat; the action taken on foot of this notification; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9682/13]

646. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health the date on which the Food Safety Authority of Ireland first became aware of the adulteration of food products with horse meat; the reason he was not the lead Minister dealing with this issue as responsibility for both food safety and the FSAI rests with his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9684/13]

647. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health as the Minister with responsibility for food safety, if he is satisfied with the integrity of the ingredients of Irish processed black and white puddings and sausages and that no adulteration of these products is taking place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9685/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 644 to 647, inclusive, together.

The Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI), as part of their monitoring and surveillance programme on labelling of foods, carried out a small survey in November 2012 to investigate the authenticity of meat products and, specifically, to check on the type of animal species in meat products. A total of 27 beef burger products were analysed. The FSAI then arranged further intense testing of the samples to validate the correctness of the initial analysis and to quantify the amount of horse DNA in each sample - the results of these tests were received on 11 January 2013. These results showed that, of the 10 burgers found to contain horse DNA, one contained 29% horsemeat, another 0.3% and the remainder had less than 0.1%. Traces of horse DNA were also detected in batches of raw ingredients, including some imported from other Member States. The FSAI communicated this information to the Department of Health on the 14th January 2013. The FSAI confirmed at the time that there were no food safety issues.

As this was not a food safety issue and there was no threat to public health it was proper that the Department of Agriculture, Food & the Marine took the lead role with regard to the incident as they have primary responsibility relating to primary food processing. Accordingly, since the initial test results were confirmed, that Department has conducted further tests on numerous establishments to identify the exact source of the equine DNA and work is ongoing in this regard. Furthermore, the Minister for Agriculture, Food & the Marine has initiated and led a rapid and collective response to the horsemeat incident in Europe in his capacity as President of Council of Agriculture Ministers.

While this is not a food safety issue, officials from my Department are in daily contact with

the FSAI in relation to the ongoing horsemeat incident in Europe to ensure there remains no threat to public health. Since January, extensive sampling and testing of beef products by both regulatory authorities and the food industry has been undertaken. Testing is continuing in Ireland and elsewhere. A major EU wide programme of testing of beef products for the presence of equine DNA is now underway. While many sausage and black and white puddings are pork rather than beef based products, to date no evidence has emerged to suggest they are the subject of adulteration.

Accident and Emergency Departments Waiting Times

648. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health if he is satisfied with the current waiting times at the accident and emergency department in Kerry General Hospital; if there is an adequate complement of staff currently working in the the A&E; the way current waiting times compare with the previous five years and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9687/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): In relation to the query on staffing raised by the Deputy, as this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy in this matter. In relation to the waiting times, I have asked the Business Intelligence Unit, within the Health Service Executive, to respond directly to the Deputy.

Health Services Reports

649. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Health with reference to the Fottrell Report 2006, the NCMET Report, and the Second Interim Report on the Implementation of the Reform of the Intern Year April 2012, his views on the health service's usage of available talent; if he envisages improved returns on State investment in medical education; his further views on the impact of the intern year process on the personal welfare of medical graduates; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9692/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): Arising from the recommendation of the Report of the Undergraduate Medical Education and Training Group (Fottrell 2006), to significantly increase the medical student intake of the Irish medical schools, the number of intern posts available within the HSE increased from 488 to 650 (the expected number of posts for the July 2013 intake). The HSE anticipates that all EU graduates from Irish medical schools who meet the eligibility criteria for intern posts and who desire to remain in Ireland for an internship starting in July 2013, will be accommodated within the Irish public health service. The HSE has in place formal agreements with the Intern Training Networks/Universities regarding the provision of the Medical Council accredited National Intern Training Programme.

The main reforms of the intern year as recommended by the Report of the National Committee on Medical Education and Training (NCMET) have been implemented by the HSE in collaboration and consultation with the Medical Council and the relevant educational partners at both undergraduate and postgraduate level. The HSE has formal agreements in place with the recognised postgraduate medical training bodies in Ireland regarding the provision of specialist medical education and training to the Non Consultant Hospital Doctor (NCHD) cohort in Ireland. These agreements set out the number of doctors to be trained by each training body both by year of training and by specialty. This number is determined by the HSE following consultation with the training bodies and consideration of current and future workforce requirements for qualified specialists.

The HSE also has formal agreements in place with the recognised postgraduate medical training bodies in Ireland regarding the provision of professional development programmes to NCHDs not engaged in specialist training in Ireland. The objective of these programmes is to facilitate this cohort of doctors to maintain their professional competence. In recent years the HSE has invested significantly in the expansion and development of existing and new specialist medical training programmes including the development of a basic specialist training programme in Emergency Medicine; the expansion and reconfiguration of specialist training in Anaesthesia; and an increase in GP training numbers from 120 per year to 157, in line with GP workforce requirements.

In addition, the HSE has implemented two scholarship programmes specifically targeting NCHDs in their latter stages of training. The first programme enables NCHDs to undertake specialist training in novel medical areas abroad with a view to returning and developing their new expertise within the Irish health service as specialists. The second programme supports NCHDs in undertaking an integrated PhD research programme with their higher specialist training, thereby further developing high quality relevant clinical research in Ireland.

Hospital Trusts

650. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health if he considers that criteria such as existing partnerships, existing geographical links and patient access to appropriate services will be key in choosing the appropriate partnerships in his Department's project plan for the establishment of acute hospital groups which would support the co-location of the Rotunda and Mater Hospitals, Dublin, as indicated by KPMG report of 2008; if, at the very least, he will not make a final decision until after the publication of the review of maternity models of care currently being undertaken by the Health Service Executive; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9695/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): A key stepping stone to the introduction of Universal Health Insurance will be to develop independent not-for-profit hospital trusts in which all hospitals will function as part of an integrated group. As a first step on that journey, hospitals will be aligned within groups on an administrative basis. The rationale behind the establishment of hospital groups and trusts is to support increased operational autonomy and accountability for hospital services in a way that will drive the service reforms and provide the maximum possible benefit to patients.

It is well recognised that the Rotunda Hospital provides leadership in maternity services obstetrics, midwifery, neonatology and gynaecology services to all of north Dublin and the north-east. Strong clinical links with the Mater Misericordiae University Hospital, including joint consultant appointments, are a fundamental support to the work of the Rotunda, and this will continue in any configuration in which the Rotunda is required to operate. It is neither intended nor anticipated that the Rotunda will be constrained by being positioned within a particular group. As well as its long standing links with the Mater, which can and should be retained, it would also be appropriate for the Rotunda to establish links with other hospitals to meet its future aspirations for sub-specialty development and to expand and consolidate the links which currently exist.

With regard to the framework within which maternity services are delivered, the Deputy refers to the KPMG Independent Review of Maternity and Gynaecology Services in the Greater Dublin Area and to a review of maternity models of care. The KPMG report, which was completed in 2008, noted that Dublin's model of stand alone maternity hospitals is not the norm internationally and recommended that the Dublin maternity hospitals should be co-located with

adult acute services and that one of the three new Dublin maternity facilities should be built on the site of the new national paediatric hospital. In regard to the review of maternity models of care referred to by the Deputy, work is currently ongoing in the HSE's Clinical Programme for Obstetrics and Gynaecology on the development of models of care for maternity services, which includes a review of current models with the development of a proposal for future developments. Both the KPMG report and the review to be carried out by the Clinical Programme will inform the delivery of maternity services in Dublin and nationally, as appropriate.

Hospital Waiting Lists

651. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health if an early date for a hip operation will be arranged in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Carlow. [9720/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The management of inpatient and daycase waiting lists for patients awaiting public health care is based on the principle that after urgent and cancer patients are treated, then clinically assessed routine patients should be seen in chronological order (i.e. longest waiter first). Should the patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he/she would be in the best position to take the matter up with the consultant and hospital involved. 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.

Vaccination Programme

652. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health his plans to introduce the new Meningitis B vaccine into the immunisation programme; and if so, if he will indicate how soon this will happen; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9729/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The immunisation programme in Ireland is based on the advice of the National Immunisation Advisory Committee (NIAC). NIAC is a committee of the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland comprising of experts in a number of specialties including infectious diseases, paediatrics and public health. The committee's recommendations are informed by public health advice, international best practice and by the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics (NCPE). A Health Technology Assessment which includes a cost benefit analysis is carried out prior to any new vaccine being considered. This has a vital role in ensuring that care technologies, including vaccines, are used in a manner appropriate to their ability to maximise health gain and achieve value for money. Should NIAC advice recommend the inclusion of a new vaccine into the primary childhood immunisation programme in Ireland, my Department, in association with the Health Service Executive's National Immunisation Office will examine the issue.

Vaccination Programme

653. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health his plans to include a chicken pox vaccine as part of the national immunisation programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9732/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The immunisation programme in Ireland is based on the advice of the National Immunisation Advisory Committee (NIAC). NIAC is a committee of the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland comprising of experts in a number of

specialties including infectious diseases, paediatrics and public health. The committee's recommendations are informed by public health advice, international best practice and by the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics (NCPE). Varicella vaccination is currently recommended by the NIAC for at-risk groups including:

- Healthcare workers without a definite history of chickenpox, or proof of immunity, particularly those working with haematology, oncology, obstetrical, general paediatric or neonatal patients

- Laboratory staff who may be exposed to varicella virus in the course of their work

- Healthy susceptible close household contacts of immunocompromised patients.

Respite Care Services

654. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide two weeks respite care urgently to a person (details supplied) in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9740/13]

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

HSE Staffing

655. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if it is still the case that the Health Service Executive workers automatically become permanet in their position after they have been working for the HSE for more than five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9779/13]

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

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

656. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide up to date figures detailing the number of prostheses users by county/region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9783/13]

657. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the total spend, the number and detailed breakdown of sanctioned orders for prostheses by the Health Service Executive from 2008 to 2012 by county/region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9784/13]

658. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the criteria by which officers with responsibility for sanctioning prostheses are appointed and the respective qualifications by discipline required; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9785/13]

659. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the length of time taken to sanction orders for prostheses and associated appliances by county/region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9786/13]

660. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide in tabular form

the number of persons on waiting lists for prostheses and associated appliances by county/region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9787/13]

661. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide the criteria used by county/regional offices in making decisions to sanction spending on prostheses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9788/13]

662. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide up to date figures detailing the number of orthotic patients by county/region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9789/13]

663. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the total spend by the Health Service Executive on orthotics from 2008 to 2012 by county/region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9790/13]

664. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the current length of time taken to sanction orders for orthotics and associated appliances by county/region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9791/13]

665. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide in tabular form the number of persons on waiting lists for orthotics and associated appliances by county/region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9792/13]

666. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the criteria used by county/regional offices in making decisions to sanction spending on orthotics; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9793/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): I propose to take Questions Nos. 656 to 666, inclusive, together.

People with disabilities may be eligible for medical/surgical aids and appliances from the Health Service Executive (HSE) including prosthetics and orthotics, which facilitate and/or maintain mobility and/or functional independence. The basis for this provision is in the Health Act, 1970. Medical Card holders and Long-Term Illness Card holders received prosthetics and orthotics where it is deemed appropriate and specific to their diagnosed illness or disability. Assessments are carried out by a range of multi-disciplinary staff. Approval is prioritised to ensure that people with the most urgent assessed needs have their needs met first. As with all health services, approvals must remain within the annual budget for prosthetics and orthotics.

The information requested by the Deputy is not available to my Department. However, I have asked the HSE to provide directly to you, the information it has available in relation to prosthetic and orthotic service provision.

Hospital Procedures

667. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding urgent eye surgery in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Laois; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9799/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): Should the patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he/she would be in the best position to take the matter up with the consultant and hospital involved. 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. 668 answered with Question No. 640.

Long-Term Illness Scheme Coverage

669. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if he will include polio as a qualifying illness under the long term illness scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9801/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): There are no plans to extend the list of conditions covered by the Long Term Illness Scheme. Under the Drug Payment Scheme, no individual or family pays more than €144 per calendar month towards the cost of approved prescribed medicines. The scheme significantly reduces the cost burden for families and individuals incurring ongoing expenditure on medicines. In addition, people who cannot, without undue hardship, arrange for the provision of medical services for themselves and their dependants may be entitled to a medical card. In the assessment process, the Health Service Executive can take into account medical costs incurred by an individual or a family. Those who are not eligible for a medical card may still be able to avail of a GP visit card, which covers the cost of general practice consultation.

Long-Term Illness Scheme Coverage

670. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if he will allow polio sufferers to be assessed for a medical card based on medical need only; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9802/13]

719. **Deputy Eoghan Murphy** asked the Minister for Health his plans to allow Polio survivors to qualify for a medical card automatically and if he is considering categorising Polio as an illness under the long term illness scheme. [10243/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): I propose to take Questions Nos. 670 and 719 together.

Medical cards are not awarded to any particular group of patients on the basis of a specific medical condition.

Under the provisions of the Health Act 1970, eligibility for health services in Ireland is based primarily on residency and means. 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 with any specific illness. There is a provision for discretion to grant a card in cases of "undue hardship" where the income guidelines are exceeded. The HSE 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. Once a letter from the patient's GP or consultant is received stating that the person is terminally ill and the required personal details are provided,

an emergency card is issued to that person for a six-month period. There are no plans to extend the list of conditions covered by the Long Term Illness Scheme.

Vaccine Damage Compensation Scheme

671. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the date on which he will be introducing a vaccine damage compensation scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9803/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The issues contained in the Report of the Vaccine Damage Steering Group are complex. They need to be considered in the wider context of how best to address the long term health and social needs of people who may have experienced adverse outcomes from all healthcare interventions.

Food Labelling

672. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health if his Department will be present at the Codex Committee on Food Labelling in Charlottetown, PEI, Canada, from 14 May 2013 to 17 May 2013; his position on the establishment of new calorie count information; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9809/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The CODEX Committee meeting in May 2013 will be attended by officials from both Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and the FSAI. The FSAI will be leading the EU delegation at this meeting. The Department of Health continues to attend meetings of the Irish Codex Advisory Committee. The Department will meet with the FSAI prior to the May meeting to ensure that Irish health policy is reflected during those discussions. In 2012, my Department requested the FSAI to conduct a national consultation on the display of calories on menus. Over 95% of respondents expressed their support for this initiative. I then wrote personally to a range of fast food restaurants requesting that they display calories on menus on a voluntary basis. Recent monitoring information from the FSAI, found that almost half of the 19 fast food restaurants, coffee shops and catering companies are now displaying calories on menus. I consider that this will help consumers to make healthier eating choices. To assist the companies concerned, the FSAI has published technical instructions for Irish food business operators. It is also in the process of developing a software tool to help Irish companies to count the calories in dishes that are on menus for more than 30 days per year. The FSAI is currently conducting a large telephone survey and quality assessment evaluating the uptake of calorie menu labelling by Food Service Businesses in Ireland. The final survey results will be ready for publication in March 2013.

National Treatment Purchase Fund Payments

673. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the annual spend from the National Treatment Purchase Fund from 2009 to 2012 for the treatment of bilateral cochlear implants abroad; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9817/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): No spending has been incurred by the National Treatment Purchase Fund during the period 2009 to 2012 for such treatment.

Medical Card Applications

674. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if he will review an application for a medical card in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare whose financial circumstances have changed since their original application; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9831/13]

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.

Question No. 675 answered with Question No. 617.

Cochlear Implants

676. **Deputy Gerald Nash** asked the Minister for Health if the Health Service Executive intends to upgrade and enhance the audiology unit in Beaumont Hospital, Dublin; if the HSE intends to make resources available to enable all children who require bilateral cochlear implants to have the essential procedure carried out; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9838/13]

679. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the outcome of the business plan submission made by Beaumont Hospital, Dublin, for consideration in the 2013 Service Plan for the provision of bilateral cochlear implants; the action being taken and the timeframe involved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9855/13]

714. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 671, 735 and 736 of 19 February 2013, the steps that will be put in place to deal with children who suffer late onset hearing impairment or deafness which may not be picked up in new born screening; the way this group will be affected by any decision that the Health Service Executive and Beaumont Hospital, Dublin, come to in relation to cochlear implants; if he envisages an age cut off point; if guidelines will be put in place to identify which children are suitable for bilateral implants; if he will ensure that those children who suffer from late onset hearing impairment will not be discriminated against. [10229/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 676, 679 and 714 together.

The HSE undertook a National Review of Audiology Services. The National Audiology Review Group developed a comprehensive set of recommendations to address the inconsistencies and inadequacies in audiology services which are contained in the HSE Report of the National Review of Audiology Services published in April 2011.

This report provides the blueprint for the planning, development and delivery of HSE audiology services, from new- born screening to assessment and management of adults and children with hearing problems, including cochlear implantation. That report included a recommendation that continued ring-fenced financial support be provided for the cochlear implant programme but at levels which allow for simultaneous bilateral implantation for children.

Since then, the HSE Audiology Clinical Care Programme was formed to oversee the implementation of the recommendations detailed by this report. Progress is being made on the modernisation of audiology services in Ireland with the introduction of a universal national programme of new-born hearing screening a key priority.

Beaumont Hospital is the centre for delivering Ireland's national cochlear implant programme, with surgical provision for patients under six (6) years carried out in the Children's University Hospital Temple Street. While no dedicated programme for simultaneous or sequential cochlear implantation is being carried out in Ireland at this time, some bilateral implantation has already occurred for patients, mainly very young children with certain medical conditions such as a history of meningitis or blindness. It is estimated that there are approximately 200 children in Ireland today who may be suitable for a second implant. Not all suitable patients proceed with the second implant when appraised of all the issues involved.

I am aware that Beaumont Hospital, HSE Management and the HSE's Audiology Clinical Care Programme have met recently to discuss a joint process to identify the options for developing and resourcing a programme of simultaneous and sequential cochlear implantation. An important element of this will be the development of clear clinical criteria to prioritise clients for assessment and follow on implantation. The HSE has advised that these plans will be progressed through the HSE 2014 estimates process.

Hospital Staff Issues

677. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Health if he will outline in broad detail the main achievements of the renegotiated contract with hospital consultants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9839/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): In September 2012, following intensive engagement between health service management and the consultant representative bodies at the Labour Relations Commission, a comprehensive set of measures was agreed. The agreement encompasses a range of flexibilities to enhance productivity and efficiency and to maximise the availability of consultants, as key clinical decision-makers. These measure include:

- Consultant availability for rostering for any five days out of seven as opposed to weekdays;

- Rostering of consultants on a 16/7 (8 a.m. to midnight) or 24/7 basis in services where this is required;

- Clinical Directors having a much strengthened management role in respect of consultants, with reporting relationship for all consultants to the Clinical Director;

- Consultant cooperation with a range of measures to support improved Community and Mental Health services;

- Consultant compliance with the contractual requirements regarding private practice;

- Expeditious processing and signing of claims by consultants for submission to private health insurers.

In addition more cost effective arrangements for funding of continuing medical education are currently being finalised.

The Labour Court issued its recommendations regarding a number of further issues on 6 November last covering historic rest days, ongoing rest day arrangements and the fee for the provision of a second opinion as required under the Mental Health Act, 2001. The recommendations relating to the latter two issues are binding. Health service management are now engaged in implementation of the measures covered by the LRC and Labour Court processes.

I look forward to all consultants embracing the changes agreed at the LRC and accepting the terms of the Labour Court recommendations, in the interests of providing the most appropriate and cost-effective services to patients.

Health Services Staff Issues

678. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Health the progress he is making in respect of absenteeism in the public health service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9840/13]

738. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Minister for Health his views on the reports that more than ten percent of employees in the health service are calling in sick, particularly in some areas (details supplied); the measures he has brought forward to tackle this problem to date; the success of his measures so far; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10312/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 678 and 738 together.

The absenteeism rate in the HSE in 2012 was 4.79%. This is a reduction from the 2011 rate of 4.9%. Rates remain well below absenteeism levels of 5.76% in 2008 and 5.05% in 2009.

Absenteeism is still unacceptably high and additional measures have been put in place to ensure tighter control and more robust performance management in this area. The HSE has strengthened its policies and procedures on absence management including putting in place the following measures:

- Action plans for all sites for the management of absence over 3.5%

- Analysis and reporting of certified and uncertified absence on each hospital site and community care area- Monitoring adherence to Attendance Management Policies such as return to work interviews, counselling and referral to Occupational Health

- Disciplinary process for a number of staff.

New arrangements for access to paid self-certified sick leave have been agreed for all employees in the public and civil service arising from a 2012 Labour Court Recommendation. This provides that employees may only be granted up to a maximum of 7 days' self-certified sick leave in a rolling 24-month period, with effect from 1s November 2012. This represents a halving of the previous entitlement.

Question No. 679 answered with Question No. 676.

Home Help Service Provision

680. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Health the hourly rate paid to home help workers that are directly employed by the Health Service Executive in County Mayo; the number of home help hours currently provided by these directly employed workers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9864/13]

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

Mental Health Services Provision

681. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Minister for Health the number of the promised 99 child and adolescent community mental health teams that have been delivered to date; and the number of these that are fully staffed. [9867/13]

682. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Minister for Health the number of children on the waiting list for child and adolescent mental health services; and the number that were under 16 years of age. [9868/13]

683. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Minister for Health the percentage of the health budget that is spent in the children's mental health services. [9869/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): I propose to take Questions Nos. 681 to 683, inclusive, together.

When A Vision for Change was published in 2006, there were 49 child and adolescent community mental health teams and 12 dedicated acute inpatient beds for children. Today, there are 58 community based CAMH teams and 44 acute inpatient beds, (12 in Dublin, 12 in Cork and 20 in Galway). The increase in bed capacity is reflected in an almost 50% decrease in admissions of children to adult units since 2008.

An additional 22 beds are scheduled to come on stream in 2013, (8 in Cork and 14 in Dublin), giving a projected Child and Adolescent in-patient bed capacity of 66 by the end of 2013. Planning permission has also been granted to construct a 24 bed in-patient facility on the Cherry Orchard site, Dublin and this is expected to be completed by the end of 2013/ early 2014.

Additional funding totalling €70 million has been provided as part of the last two Budgets primarily to strengthen Community Mental Health Teams for both Adults and Children. This funding is expected to provide almost 900 additional posts. The majority of the first tranche of an additional 150 Child and Adolescent Community Mental Health Team posts are expected to be in place by the end of March 2013.

As the remainder of the information sought by the Deputy relates to more detailed matters, the questions have been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Pharmacy Regulations

684. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the number of pharmacists the Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland inspected in 2011 and 2012 and to date in 2013; the number of pharmacies that were asked for a random sample of prescriptions for inspections; the average number of prescriptions requested during an inspection and of the sample requested the number of pharmacies that were either unable to provide a copy of the prescription requested or had some regulatory defect with the prescriptions dispensed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9871/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): The Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland (PSI) carries out inspections pursuant to two main sections of the Pharmacy Act 2007:-

- Inspections are carried out under Section 19 as part of the registration process for retail pharmacy businesses. Prescriptions are not reviewed as part of these inspections.

- Inspections are carried out under Section 67 to review compliance with the Pharmacy Act, regulations made thereunder and medicines legislation including the Medicinal Products (Prescription & Control of Supply) Regulations 2003 (as amended). Prescriptions are reviewed as part of these inspections.

The data obtained during inspections in 2011 and 2012 was not recorded on a computer database. Therefore the PSI manually checked 20% of inspection reports in order to ascertain the average number of prescriptions checked per inspection completed during 2011 and 2012 respectively. The figures set out below are based on these calculations. Detailed information regarding regulatory compliance with prescription legislation is not readily available for 2011 and 2012.

2011

Year	Inspection Type	Number of InspectionsCompleted	Prescriptions Checked
2011	Section 19 Inspections	95	Not applicable
2011	Section 67 Inspections	170	An average of 4.12 prescriptions were checked per pharmacy inspected.

2012

Year	Inspection Type	Number of InspectionsCompleted	Prescriptions Checked
2012	Section 19 Inspections	97	Not applicable
2012	Section 67 Inspections	75	An average of 6.6 prescriptions were checked per pharmacy inspected.

Inspection findings are recorded in a computerised database since the start of 2013. The figures set out below represents actual figures for 2013.

2013

As at the 25th February 2013, the PSI has carried out a total of 96 inspections of retail pharmacy businesses.

Year	Inspection Type	Number of InspectionsCompleted	Prescriptions Checked	Unable to provide a copy of the prescription	Regulatory Defect
2013	Section 19 Inspections	10	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable

2013	Section 67 Inspections	86The results of 68 inspections have been recorded / analysed in the computerised database.	A total of 272 prescriptions were checked across 68 inspections. An average of 4 prescriptions were checked per pharmacy inspected.	Retail Pharmacy Businesses were unable to provide the prescription in the case of 49 (18.01%) prescriptions requested.	Regulatory defects were noted in respect of 165(60.66%) prescriptions reviewed.

It should be noted that failure to present the prescription does not necessarily constitute a regulatory defect. There are circumstances where pharmacies are legally entitled to return prescriptions to patients.

Question No. 685 answered with Question No. 626.

General Medical Services Scheme Administration

686. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health the policy for the transfer of a GMS list when a principal general practitioner retires; currently there is an issue whereby a locum doctor who has worked in a GP practice at a location (details supplied) in County Westmeath for the past nine and a half years will not be offered the GMS list by the Health Service Executive following the retirement of the GP; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9942/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): As the Deputy's question relates to a service matter, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Dental Services Provision

687. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide details of the free dental services available to persons with medical cards; the waiting list for these services; if persons who lose fillings are entitled to have them replaced under this service; the delay in providing this treatment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9948/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): The Dental Treatment Services Scheme (DTSS) provides access to dental treatment for adult medical card holders. The service is provided by contracted dentists. As funding has been capped at the 2008 level of €63 million, the HSE prioritises for treatment patients with special needs, high risk patients and those who have greater clinical needs. A free oral examination every calendar year and free emergency dental treatment with a focus on relief of pain and sepsis are available to all eligible patients, regardless of their medical condition. This includes 2 fillings, all extractions and a number of complex treatments.

The National Oral Health Office of the HSE issued Standard Operating Procedures to dental contractors in November 2011 to provide clearer guidance to them on the application of DTSS prior approval requests. The Standard Operating Procedures confirm that high risk patients are to be prioritised for approval for treatment. All fillings as required and complex care including

root canal treatment, gum treatment and dentures are available to such patients subject to prior approval by the HSE.

If a patient is not deemed high risk or vulnerable and a filling has already been provided in the previous five years, a replacement filling on the same tooth is not approved. For patients who are high risk or vulnerable, a replacement filling may be approved if a satisfactory explanation as to the clinical necessity for the repeat treatment is given by the dentist.

There are no waiting lists for this service.

General Practitioner Services

688. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide an update on the estimated cost of introducing free general practitioner visits for all children aged six years and under; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9951/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): No exercise has been undertaken to estimate the cost to introduce free General Practitioner care to children aged 6 years and under.

The Programme for Government commits to reforming the current public health system by introducing Universal Health Insurance with equal access to care for all. As part of this, the Government is committed to introducing, on a phased basis, GP care without fees within its first term of office. The first phase of this process is the extension of access to GP services without fees to persons with prescribed illnesses. This legislation is currently being drafted by the Office of the Attorney General and the Department and it will be published shortly. Implementation dates and application details will be announced in due course.

Health Services Issues

689. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health the supports and services given by the autism team and autism nurse to a child (details supplied) in County Kilkenny; the number of occasions the team met with the parents of the child; if the team have responded to the concern that the child may now be suffering depression; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9993/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The particular issue raised by the Deputy is a service matter for the Health Service Executive. Accordingly I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Medical Card Delays

690. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health if an application for a full medical card will be expedited in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny. [9994/13]

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.

Hospital Procedures

691. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health if an operation at Waterford Regional Hospital will be arranged as a matter of urgency in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny; and if he will expedite the matter. [9995/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): Should the patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he/she would be in the best position to take the matter up with the consultant and hospital involved.

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

692. **Deputy Seán Kenny** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding staffing levels in the epilepsy unit at Beaumont Hospital, Dublin; when the unit will open; the way the unit will operate; the level of staffing in the unit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10025/13]

694. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health the reason the epilepsy unit in Beaumont Hospital will only open soon on a phased basis; the reason it is not fully staffed; the steps he will take to ensure that the unit opens as soon as possible; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10040/13]

737. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health when he expects the new epilepsy monitoring unit at Cork University Hospital to be opened; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10289/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 692, 694 and 737 together.

Cork and Beaumont are two of six regional centres which have been identified by the HSE's Clinical Care Programme for Epilepsy for the provision of specialist epilepsy services. Developments so far under the Programme include the opening of Rapid Access Clinics at four of these centres, including Beaumont, St James's, Galway and Limerick. The Rapid Access clinics are led by Advanced Nurse Practitioners (ANPs). Under the Programme, 10.5 (WTE) Advanced Nurse Practitioners (ANPs) have been recruited to lead these clinics so that a total of 12 ANPs are now in place across the four centres, delivering services on site and on an outreach basis.

The two Epilepsy Monitoring Units (EMUs) planned for Cork and Beaumont under the Programme will increase pre-surgical evaluation capacity. Monitoring is required for those patients with the worst effects of epilepsy, and patients at these units will require 24/7 care.

The staffing requirements to enable the units to be safely opened have been identified. I am advised that the staffing required for the unit at Beaumont includes five staff nurses, one consultant neurophysiologist and three technicians. I am advised by the HSE that, having secured recruitment approval from the National Control Group, Beaumont is progressing the recruitment of the posts necessary to support the service development.

With regard to Cork, the HSE has advised that it is the intention of the Cork University Hospital management to open the EMU in Quarter 3 of this year and this will be included in the HSE South's 2013 Regional Service Plan.

Vaccination Programme

693. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Health when the package of support promised almost 12 months ago for sufferers of narcolepsy disorder will be rolled out. [10037/13]

707. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the progress that has been made in compiling the memorandum to bring to Government in relation to comprehensive supports and services he has committed to establishing for sufferers of Unique Narcolepsy Disorder; if he will provide a date for when the memorandum will be brought to Government; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10156/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 693 and 707 together.

My priority is to ensure that children/adolescents affected by narcolepsy with symptom onset post pandemic vaccination are provided with services and supports to meet their health needs.

The HSE and the Department of Education and Skills together provide a comprehensive range of services and supports to those affected. The Health Service Executive through its advocacy unit and regional co-ordinators assist individuals affected by narcolepsy following pandemic vaccination and family members of those so affected, in accessing appropriate services and supports. These supports and services include access to rapid diagnosis, clear treatment pathways, temporary medical cards and reimbursement of expenses incurred. This includes expenses for counselling services for individuals and also for families of children affected by narcolepsy following pandemic vaccination, in cases where such services are not already available through the HSE. Multi-disciplinary assessments which allow for the appropriate individualised health and educational supports to be put in place are ongoing. The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) is also engaging with the HSE and with the individual schools and parents of children concerned to identify and provide educational supports for the children and adolescents affected.

My Department is considering other possible supports which may need to be put in place for those affected by Narcolepsy following pandemic vaccination.

Question No. 694 answered with Question No. 692.

Hospital Procedures

695. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding surgery in respect of a person (details supplied). [10041/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): In relation to this particular query raised by the Deputy, I have asked the Health Service Executive to investigate the situation and respond directly to you on this matter.

HSE Staffing

696. **Deputy Robert Dowds** asked the Minister for Health if there will be any recruitment of paramedics in 2013, 2014 or 2015; if there will be any process by which those wishing to become paramedics may become familiar with the job to better prepare them and if there will

be any age limit placed on the recruitment of paramedics. [10101/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The Government has decided that the numbers employed across the public service must be reduced in order to meet its fiscal and budgetary targets. The health sector must make its contribution to that reduction. However, the HSE can make staff appointments once it remains within its overall employment ceiling and has the financial resources to do so. As the recruitment of paramedics is a matter for the HSE in the first instance, the Deputy's enquiry has been referred to the Executive for direct reply.

General Practitioner Services

697. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for Health if he will include children in the first phase of the introduction of free general practitioner care to all as well as to those with chronic illnesses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10105/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): The Programme for Government commits to reforming the current public health system by introducing Universal Health Insurance with equal access to care for all. As part of this, the Government is committed to introducing, on a phased basis, GP care without fees within its first term of office. The first phase of this process is the extension of access to GP services without fees to persons with prescribed illnesses. It is not intended to include all children in this phase. This legislation is currently being drafted by the Office of the Attorney General and the Department and it will be published shortly. Implementation dates and application details will be announced in due course.

Departmental Correspondence

698. **Deputy Tom Hayes** asked the Minister for Health his views on the correspondence (details supplied) regarding incident forms in hospitals. [10106/13]

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

Hospital Waiting Lists

699. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if an ear, nose and throat consultation can be arranged in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10109/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): Access to outpatient waiting times is also a key priority and a maximum waiting time target has now been set that no-one should be waiting longer than 12 months for a first-time outpatient appointment. The setting of this target has been made possible by the considerable work done by the HSE and the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) working in conjunction with the SDU. For the first time, clear and comprehensive data on outpatient waiting times is available (www.ptr.ie). The collation and analysis of outpatient waiting time data in a standardised format reveals the distribution of long waiters across all hospitals. In the first instance, this allows resources to be targeted towards those patients who are waiting longest, to ensure that they are seen and assessed. In parallel with reducing the numbers of longest waiters, the SDU will this year work with the HSE National Clinical Care Programmes to reform the structure, organisation and delivery of outpatient services to en-

sure that the right patient is seen and assessed by the right health professional at the right time.

In relation to the particular query raised by the Deputy, as this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy in this matter.

Departmental Funding

700. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the funding that was made available to the Irish Patients Association for the years 2010, 2011 and 2012; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10126/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): My Department has not provided any funding to the Irish Patients Association between 2010 and 2012. I have asked the HSE to reply to you directly in respect of any funding it may have made to this organisation.

Services for People with Disabilities

701. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the number of adults with an intellectual or physical disability who are on waiting lists for day care services, respite care, residential services and the overall national figures. [10134/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The Government currently provides funding of €1.5 billion to the Disability Services Programme through the Health Service Executive (HSE) and is committed to protecting frontline services for people with disabilities to the greatest possible extent. In 2013, the HSE is seeking to maximise the provision of services within available resources and to maintaining a consistent level to that provided in 2012, by providing the following specialist disability services: residential services to over 9,000 people with a disability; day services to over 22,000 people with intellectual and physical disabilities; respite residential support for over 7,500 people with intellectual and physical disabilities; and 1.68 million hours of Personal Assistant / Home Support Hours.

The specific information requested by the Deputy is not available to my Department. However, I have asked the HSE to provide directly to you, the information it has available relevant to your question.

Departmental Funding

702. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health where funding for an organisation (details supplied) comes from for their residential and outreach services; if the organisation receives State funding; the amount of funding the organisation has received each year for the past five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10136/13]

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.

HSE Funding

703. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn

to the fact that the Health Service Executive plans to axe funding for the Irish Patients Association; if he has had any communications with the HSE in relation to this withdrawal of funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10137/13]

704. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if he will reverse the decision to axe funding for the Irish Patients Association; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10138/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 703 and 704 together.

Funding decisions in relation to the Irish Patients Association are proper to the HSE, as appropriate to its holding of the Health Vote.

The HSE has met with Departmental officials to give a background to the reduction in funding for the Association and other voluntary agencies, brought about by the financial position in which the health service finds itself and due to a re-appraisal and targeting of priorities in the light of the Executive's Service Plan 2013. The Deputies should be aware that it would not be correct for the Department to become involved in governance and funding procedures proper to the HSE.

The HSE has been in discussions with the Association since 2006/2007, in relation to it becoming self-financing; there does not appear to have been progress in this direction. (The Department was also in similar discussions with the Association in 2003/2004). The Association receives some private funding from the pharmaceutical sector.

The CEO of the Irish Patients Association met with the Secretary General of my Department in January and was appraised of the HSE's position on funding for the Association. A further meeting between the Association and the HSE was suggested and this will be arranged.

National Children's Hospital Location

705. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Health further to his announcement that the National Children's Hospital will be located at St James' Hospital, Dublin, if his Department and the management of St James' Hospital will engage with Dublin Bus, the Coach Tourism and Transport Council, and Bus Éireann with a view to establishing park and ride services linking the Children's Hospital and Bus Áras or Dublin Airport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10140/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The Dolphin Report noted that St James's has excellent public transport services with 4 bus services, a Luas stop on campus and two others adjacent. St James's Hospital has a direct Luas link with Busaras. With regard to any specific transport initiatives, these will be considered as appropriate during the lifetime of the project. It is recognised that most of the children who will attend this hospital will arrive by car and appropriate carparking provision on campus will be provided. The new children's hospital will provide secondary care for the children of the Greater Dublin Area and tertiary care for children throughout Ireland; most children around the country who need care will receive it closer to their home.

HSE Staff Remuneration

706. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide in tabular

form the number of staff that are on a total remuneration package including pension payments, allowances and benefits between €50,000 and €100,000, between €100,000 and €200,000, between €200,000 and €300,000, between €300,000 and €400,000 and the number with more than €400,000 at the Health Service Executive; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10151/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The numbers employed in the health service have been reduced from over 111,000 at end-December 2008 to 101,506 at end-December 2012. In addition, salary scales for all health service grades have been reduced in line with Government decisions.

I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy with the detailed information requested.

Question No. 707 answered with Question No. 693.

Departmental Agencies Staff Remuneration

708. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide details of the payment of bonuses or other performance related payments and or allowances made to the staff of agencies under the aegis of his Department with a yearly breakdown from 2008 outlining the overall amount paid in each year period and the number of staff that received such payments and or allowances. [10167/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): A number of performance related award schemes were introduced in the health service following a decision by the then Government on the implementation of recommendations of the Review Body on Higher Remuneration in the Public Sector, in a report published in September 2000. In May 2009, in the context of the serious deterioration in the public finances and in view of the cessation of such awards in the civil service, my Department wrote to the HSE stating that bonus payments should be suspended pending the issue of further guidelines. In March 2010, my Department instructed the HSE that the schemes should be suspended on an indefinite basis; the schemes remain suspended.

The Deputy's question, insofar as it relates to any payments made prior to the suspension of the schemes, has been referred to the HSE for direct reply. The information in respect of the Non-Commercial State Agencies under the aegis of my Department is currently being collated and will be forwarded to the Deputy as soon as it is available.

Departmental Agencies Staff Remuneration

709. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide details of payments made to the CEO or equivalent of all agencies under the aegis of his Department including details of any bonuses, pension entitlements or any other remuneration paid to him or her in 2012. [10184/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): With regard to the HSE, the Executive has been asked to provide the information directly to the Deputy. The information in relation to the other agencies under the aegis of my Department, is currently being collated by my staff and will be forwarded to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Hospitals Funding

710. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the way additional funds recently announced for Beaumont Hospital, Dublin 9, will be spent; if he will provide a detailed breakdown of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10205/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): In relation to the particular query raised by the Deputy, as this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy in this matter.

HSE Staffing

711. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the number of Health Service Executive staff by job title that retired during each month of 2012 and to date in 2013 in community care area 8; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10206/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The detailed information sought by the Deputy in relation to staff retirements is a matter for the HSE and, accordingly, I have asked the Executive to respond directly to him.

Hospital Staff Issues

712. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the number of consultant nephrologists here; their grade and location; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10207/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): Subject to overall parameters set by Government, the Health Service Executive has responsibility for determining the composition of its staffing complement. I have asked the Executive to compile the information requested by the Deputy and to reply to him directly.

Appointments to State Boards

713. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health when he will fill the four vacancies on the board of the Health Information and Quality Authority; the number of persons who have expressed an interest in serving on the board; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10208/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The four vacancies on the Board of the Health and Information Quality Authority were filled by me on the 14 and 15 February. Three of the appointments were from applications received through the Public Appointments Service advertising process. There were 40 applications in total.

Question No. 714 answered with Question No. 676.

Cochlear Implants

715. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the steps being taken to provide a bilateral cochlear implant in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Cork; if funding

can be secured privately can the implant operation now be carried out. [10230/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The HSE undertook a National Review of Audiology Services. The National Audiology Review Group developed a comprehensive set of recommendations to address the inconsistencies and inadequacies in audiology services which are contained in the HSE Report of the National Review of Audiology Services published in April 2011.

Since then, the HSE Audiology Clinical Care Programme was formed to oversee the implementation of the recommendations detailed by this report. Progress is being made on the modernisation of audiology services in Ireland with the introduction of a universal national programme of new-born hearing screening a key priority.

In relation to your query regarding the individual referred to in your question, as this is a clinical issue I have forwarded the question to the HSE who will respond directly to you.

Question No. 716 answered with Question No. 626.

Hospital Waiting Lists

717. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Health the number on the waiting list for occupational therapy intervention in County Kerry; the length of time they are waiting; the number on the waiting list for paediatric occupational therapy in County Kerry and the length of time they are waiting; when he will address these waiting lists; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10238/13]

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.

Speech and Language Therapy

718. **Deputy Eoghan Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if a graduate programme for speech and language therapists will be introduced in 2013. [10242/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The Government has decided that the numbers employed across the public service must be reduced in order to meet its fiscal and budgetary targets. The health sector must make its contribution to that reduction.

The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform agreed to a nurse graduate initiative on the basis that it would deliver significant savings through displacement of agency and overtime expenditure.

I have no plans at present for similar graduate programmes for other health professions.

Question No. 719 answered with Question No. 670.

HSE Staffing

720. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Health if he will immediately lift the moratorium on staff recruitment in the Health Service Executive and appoint occupational

therapists to address the waiting lists for occupational therapy intervention in County Kerry and the waiting list for paediatric occupational therapy in the County Kerry; if he will address these waiting lists that are most unreasonable; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10244/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The Government has decided that the numbers employed across the public service must be reduced in order to meet its fiscal and budgetary targets. The health sector must make its contribution to that reduction. However, the HSE can make staff appointments once it remains within its overall employment ceiling and has the financial resources to do so. As the recruitment of occupational therapists is a matter for the HSE in the first instance, the Deputy's enquiry has been referred to the Executive for direct reply.

Hospital Trusts

721. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health if he will ensure that existing links between the Rotunda and the Mater hospitals, Dublin, are maintained under the project in view of the fact that the Mater Hospital is the Rotunda Hospital's nearest adult acute hospital and long time clinical partner and it is an extremely convenient location if the Rotunda Hospital needs to transfer any high-risk adult patients for specialist care; his views on whether the best fit for patient outcomes would be for the Rotunda Hospital to relocate with the Mater Hospital and continue to provide assistance and care to the north east region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10255/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): A key stepping stone to the introduction of Universal Health Insurance will be to develop independent not-for-profit hospital trusts in which all hospitals will function as part of an integrated group. As a first step on that journey, hospitals will be aligned within groups on an administrative basis. The rationale behind the establishment of hospital groups and trusts is to support increased operational autonomy and accountability for hospital services in a way that will drive the service reforms and provide the maximum possible benefit to patients.

It is well recognised that the Rotunda Hospital provides leadership in maternity services obstetrics, midwifery, neonatology and gynaecology services to all of north Dublin and the north-east. Strong clinical links with the Mater Misericordiae University Hospital, including joint consultant appointments, are a fundamental support to the work of the Rotunda, and this will continue in any configuration in which the Rotunda is required to operate. It is neither intended nor anticipated that the Rotunda will be constrained by being positioned within a particular group. As well as its long standing links with the Mater, which can and should be retained, it would also be appropriate for the Rotunda to establish links with other hospitals to meet its future aspirations for sub-specialty development and to expand and consolidate the links which currently exist.

The KPMG Independent Review of Maternity and Gynaecology Services in Greater Dublin, which was completed in 2008, noted that Dublin's model of stand alone maternity hospitals is not the norm internationally and recommended that the Dublin maternity hospitals should be co-located with adult acute services and that one of the three new Dublin maternity facilities should be built on the site of the new national paediatric hospital. The intention has been that the National Maternity Hospital should be relocated to St Vincent's, the Coombe to Tallaght and the Rotunda to the Mater, and the maternity hospitals have been working with the relevant adult sites to progress this. There will be early discussions with the maternity hospitals regarding their maternity /adult co-location plans in the context of the Government decision to build

the new children's hospital on the St James's campus. Notwithstanding this, I am committed to the intent of the report - that the Dublin maternity hospitals be located alongside adult acute services - while also bearing in mind the need to plan for the provision of tri-located paediatric, adult and maternity services, as is the intention in relation to the new children's hospital.

Orthodontic Services Waiting Lists

722. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons awaiting orthodontic treatment in County Kerry; the length of time they are waiting; the progress that has been made to reduce the waiting lists in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10256/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): The HSE provides orthodontic treatment to patients based on their level of clinical need. An individual's access to orthodontic treatment is determined against a set of clinical guidelines and priority is given to patients with greatest needs. The HSE has been asked to examine the specific query raised by the Deputy and to reply to him as soon as possible.

HSE Staffing

723. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Health when it is proposed to replace the retiring doctor in Milltownpass, County Westmeath in view of the fact that this health provision is essential to the area as the Health Service Executive do not own a health centre to provide such a service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10265/13]

724. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide details of the number of applicants for the post of general practitioner in Milltownpass, County Westmeath under the GMS system, advertising for which has been facilitated by the Health Service Executive in December 2012 and January, 2013, without a successful candidate being identified; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10266/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): I propose to take Questions Nos. 723 and 724 together.

As the Deputy's question relates to a service matter, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Applications

725. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Longford will be issued with a grant in respect of nursing home support respite under the fair deal scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10268/13]

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

Medical Card Applications

726. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied)

in County Longford will be issued with their full medical card; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10269/13]

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.

Hospital Services

727. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide the numbers of podiatrist posts linked to the Midlands Regional Hospital diabetes service and his plans to extend the service to Longford to enhance the care of local diabetes patients and improve their quality of life; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10272/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The HSE National Clinical Programme for Diabetes - which includes the care of children and adolescents with diabetes - was established within the Clinical Strategy and Programmes Directorate. The purpose of the Programme is to define the way diabetic Clinical Services should be delivered, resourced and measured; and a clinician has been appointed to lead on the development of the programme. One of the objectives of the National Diabetes Programme is to develop a footcare screening and treatment service to prevent foot ulceration and subsequent lower limb amputation. In relation to the specific queries raised by the Deputy, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy in this matter.

Medical Card Applications

728. **Deputy Patrick Nulty** asked the Minister for Health if a medical card application will be granted on exceptional medical grounds in respect of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 15; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10276/13]

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.

Long-Term Illness Scheme Expenditure

729. **Deputy Gerald Nash** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide in tabular form the total cost of the long term illness scheme for the years 2009 to 2012 inclusive; and the cost per patient availing of this scheme. [10279/13]

730. **Deputy Gerald Nash** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide in tabular form the administration costs of the long term illness scheme for the years 2009 to 2012 inclusive. [10280/13]

731. **Deputy Gerald Nash** asked the Minister for Health if he has given consideration to abolishing the long term illness scheme and giving any patient with a defined long term illness a medical card, in view of the fact that patients on the long term illness scheme already have their medication paid for and will, under the Programme for Government be in receipt of general practitioner cards; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10281/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): I propose to take Questions Nos. 729 to 731, inclusive, together.

The information requested in relation to the Long Term Illness (LTI) scheme, for the years 2009 to 2011, is set out in the following table:

	2011	2010	2009
Cost of the LTI scheme	€118.1m	€126.92m	€139.76m
Number of claimants	59,274	67,492	65,731
Cost per claimant	€1,992	€1,881	€2,126

The figures for 2012 are not yet available.

In general, administration costs of the Primary Care Reimbursement Service (PCRS) represent less than 1% of the payments expenditure associated with all the PCRS schemes.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 with any specific illness.

There is a provision for discretion to grant a card in cases of "undue hardship" where the income guidelines are exceeded. The HSE 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. Once a letter from the patient's GP or consultant is received stating that the person is terminally ill and the required personal details are provided, an emergency card is issued to that person for a six-month period. The Programme for Government commits to reforming the current public health system by introducing Universal Health Insurance with equal access to care for all. As part of this, the Government is committed to introducing, on a phased basis, GP care without fees within its first term of office. Primary legislation is required to give effect to Government commitment to introduce a universal GP service without fees.

Legislation to allow the Minister for Health to make regulations to extend access to GP services without fees to persons with prescribed illnesses is currently being drafted by the Office of the Attorney General and the Department and it will be published shortly. Implementation dates and application details will be announced in due course. There are no plans to abolish the LTI scheme and give medical cards to patients with defined long term illnesses.

Medical Card Reviews

732. **Deputy Gerald Nash** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide in tabular form the total cost of assessing persons for eligibility for medical cards for the years 2009 to 2012 inclusive [10282/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): The information sought by the Deputy is not readily available. However, I have asked the Health Service Executive to supply this information to me and I will forward it to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Eligibility

733. **Deputy Gerald Nash** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide in tabular form the total cost of assessing persons for eligibility for the fair deal scheme for the years 2009 to 2012 inclusive. [10283/13]

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

Medical Card Eligibility

734. **Deputy Gerald Nash** asked the Minister for Health the links that are in place between the Health Service Executive and the Department of Social Protection and the Revenue to assist with means testing in determining persons eligibility when applying for medical cards or fair deal. [10284/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): Legislation is currently being drafted by the Office of the Attorney General and the Department which will provide a legal basis for the exchange of personal data between the HSE and the Revenue Commissioners and the Department of Social Protection which will enhance the ability of the HSE to verify and audit the accuracy of eligibility status on the national medical card database.

The HSE has some links with the Department of Social Protection to assist with means testing in determining eligibility for the Fair Deal scheme. In a number of Nursing Homes Support offices, the HSE has access to the Department of Social Protection's IT system -which provide details of applicant's means. Information is shared in accordance with data protection legislation and social welfare legislation.

In regard to the HSE links with the Revenue Commissioners, there are no direct links between Revenue and the HSE to assist with means testing in determining a person's eligibility when applying for financial support under the Fair Deal Scheme.

Medical Card Eligibility

735. **Deputy Gerald Nash** asked the Minister for Health if he will give consideration to the idea of transferring responsibility for assessing eligibility for medical cards and the fair deal scheme to the Department of Social Protection on the basis that it could potentially eliminate the duplication of functions between Departments and agencies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10285/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): Under the Health Act 1970, determination of eligibility for a medical card is the responsibility of the Health Service Executive. There are no proposals to alter this process under consideration by the Government. The Nursing Home Support Schemes Act 2009 governs assessment under the Fair Deal Scheme and likewise there are no proposals to alter this process under consideration.

Question No. 736 answered with Question No. 626.

Question No. 737 answered with Question No. 692.

Question No. 738 answered with Question No. 678.

HIQA Investigations

739. **Deputy Seamus Healy** asked the Minister for Health when he intends to introduce legislation to enable the Health Information and Quality Authority to inspect and investigate any problems, should they exist, in sheltered homes for the elderly; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10318/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): At this time there are no plans to extend the remit of HIQA to sheltered housing for the disabled and the elderly.

Medicinal Products Licensing

740. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Questions No. 476 of 11 December 2012 and No. 220 of 13 February 2013, the reason the Health Service Executive is not providing the information sought in these questions in view of the fact that the company (details supplied) on whose behalf the questions were tabled is not in litigation with the HSE; if the litigation referred to by the HSE was ongoing in December 2012 when Parliamentary Question No. 476 of 11 December 2012 was tabled; the timeframe the litigation referred to has been going on; the reason litigation is relevant to the HSE making a decision as to the company's 14 applications given that when the applications were made no mention was made of any litigation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10326/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): As I indicated in my reply on 13 February, the company referred to by the Deputy is one of a number of companies engaged in the parallel importation of drugs and medicines into the State. The HSE has been seeking reductions in the price of the products involved.

The litigation referred to in my previous reply was ongoing in December last, the Notice of Motion having been issued on 8 March 2012. The HSE is unable to comment further in light of the fact that a threat of Judicial Review proceedings has been made by the company in respect of its 14 applications by way of solicitors' letters to the HSE issued in 2012 and 2013.

General Practitioner Services

741. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 1 of 14 February 2013, if he will clarify what he means where he points out that legislation to extend access to general practitioner services without fees to persons with prescribed illnesses and it will be published shortly; the expected date for publication of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10358/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): The Government's Programme for Government committed it to major reforms of the manner in which health services are delivered. As part of the reform programme, Universal Primary Care is to be introduced on a phased basis during its term of office. Primary legislation is being prepared to give effect to this commitment. The wording of this legislation, which will allow the Minister for Health to make regulations to extend access to GP services without fees to persons with prescribed illnesses, is currently being drafted by the Office of the Attorney General and the Department. As the legislation is still being drafted, I am not in a position to give a definite date for its publication. Details of an implementation timeframe, illnesses to be covered etc and

application details will be announced in due course.

Health Services Allowances

742. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding placement allowances in respect of a person (details supplied). [10417/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The HSE has in the past confirmed to all health sector employers that Student Medical Scientists on placement must be paid the monthly training allowance as set out in my Department's consolidated salary scales. This allowance was approved for continued award to new beneficiaries, following the review of public sector allowances conducted in 2012. The HSE has recently reiterated in clear terms to hospitals that this allowance should be paid to all Student Medical Scientists on work placement. I have asked the HSE to seek confirmation from the hospitals concerned that the necessary amounts are being paid.

Road Traffic Legislation

743. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to review the time limits on drug and alcohol testing; the legislation involved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10131/13]

744. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to make leaving the scene of a fatal accident an indictable offence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10133/13]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 743 and 744 together.

My Department is currently engaged with the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel on the drafting of a new Road Traffic Bill. Neither the issue of time-limits within which drug and alcohol testing must take place nor the question of making leaving the scene of an accident where damage to persons or property occurs an indictable offence was included in the original General Scheme of the Bill.

However, as I indicated to the Deputy in the Dáil on 20 February 2013, I am open to considering the option of making an offence under section 106 of the Road Traffic Act 1961 - the section addressing leaving the scene of an accident - an indictable offence in certain circumstances. I will be seeking legal advice on the matter, in due course, including the proportionality of any such a change to how the offence will be tried in court.

The issue of time-limits for conducting drug and alcohol tests is also one to which I will give consideration in consultation with the Medical Bureau of Road Safety. In this case there are both scientific and medical issues to be considered, as alcohol and drugs will break down in the bloodstream over time, and later testing may not be of benefit in determining levels of intoxicants at the time of actual driving.

Tourism Industry Issues

745. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the

position regarding a project (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9562/13]

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 contact my private office if a reply is not received within ten working days.

Rural Transport Services Provision

746. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will outline the future proposals for the Westmeath rural transport scheme. [9587/13]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): An overall budget of €9.133 million has been allocated to the Rural Transport Programme by my Department for 2013. I understand that €129,353 of the 2013 budget has been allocated to Westmeath Rural Community Transport from January to June, 2013, with a further proposed allocation of €129,353 from July to December.

Since becoming Minister for Public and Commuter Transport the developments I have initiated have been aimed at ensuring that into the future we have a more complete and cost effective transport service offering in rural areas that better meets the transport needs of all users. To this end national responsibility for local and rural transport services integration, including the Rural Transport Programme (RTP) was assigned to the National Transport Authority (NTA) with effect from 1st April 2012, putting such services in a broader transport context.

I also established the National Integrated Rural Transport (NIRT) Committee in April 2012, comprising key stakeholders and chaired by the NTA, to oversee and manage a partnership approach to implementing integrated local and rural transport. There is significant scope for achieving greater levels of transport integration and coordinated delivery across a range of Exchequer funded local and rural transport services such as school and HSE transport services.

I am very aware of the very valuable work done on the ground by the RTP Groups such as Westmeath Rural Transport in ensuring that the transport needs of their local community are being identified and delivered within available resources. However, given resources are limited and that the Value for Money and Policy Review of the RTP, published last year, recommended organisational restructuring to achieve efficiencies and the establishment of better alignment between the 35 RTP groups and local authorities, it is necessary that the current delivery mechanisms and structures are examined and revised.

Work is underway to determine the optimal structure for the delivery of rural transport from an efficiency and service perspective. One of the proposals being examined is that the RTPs be "aligned" with local authorities and that a number of Coordination Units be established. Discussions are taking place with the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, the County and City Managers Association and the Rural Transport Network in the context of aligning the new structure with the local authority structure. I would emphasise that no decision has been taken but I am hopeful that I will be in a position to recommend a new structure later this year which will allow for the maximising of spend on services and the reduction of administration costs.

I will be ensuring that any future structure for the rural transport programme will be based on community input, local flexibility and involving the voluntary sector. Rural Transport by its nature is community-based and this will remain under any new structure. While I can under-

stand and fully appreciate that this creates a level of uncertainty for RTP groups, I am hopeful that the outcome will be a better service delivered more efficiently. I will work with all involved over the coming months to make any transition as smooth as possible.

Driving Licence Issues

747. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will report on the process of establishing a new system of photo capture for driving licences which has been awarded solely to the National Driver Licence Service; if there was a competitive tendering process for his new system; his views regarding the impact of the ending of photo ID services in local business including local pharmacies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9631/13]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Following a Government decision, the driver licensing service has been centralised under the Road Safety Authority (RSA). With effect from 12th January 2013, the RSA is now the sole driver licensing authority for the State. The RSA has decided to operate this function under the title National Driver Licence Service.

The service will be provided through three service contracts and by the establishment of a specialist unit within the RSA. The three contracts will provide for a card production facility, 'back-office' processing services and 'front-office' customer interface. The RSA has awarded these contracts following competitive tendering processes.

I understand that the issue of photo identification formed part of the specifications for the 'front-office' tender. I have asked the RSA to provide specific details on this aspect directly to the Deputy.

Tourism Promotion

748. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason Ireland is not keeping pace with the demand for youth travel and urgently developing this sector as there is huge potential for tourism and jobs in view of the fact that Dublin has been voted number eight city in the youth travellers list and number one in Europe; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9636/13]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The development and promotion of particular tourism niches and markets are operational matters for the tourism agencies. However, with regard to the matter raised by the Deputy, I am advised that approximately two out of every five visitors to Ireland are under 35 years of age, clearly demonstrating the importance of younger visitors for Irish tourism and justifying the tourism agencies' active pursuit of the youth segment. The strong promotion of Ireland as a destination for school group visits, study tours for third level colleges and learning English as a foreign language also appeals to the younger traveller.

Market research indicates that these younger visitors are looking for active, stimulating holidays with plenty to see and do by day and by night. Such visitors also tend to be web users and share their experiences via social media. Accordingly, Fáilte Ireland is tailoring and packaging tourism products and experiences to meet their needs, focusing particularly on digital channels to reach this segment and is in the process of developing a "Product Development and Communications Plan" to increase its reach further. In terms of overseas promotions, Tourism Ireland

is specifically targeting younger holidaymakers in our key markets through a range of promotional activity, with social media playing an important role, as well as publicity on and offline, video on demand, cinema, top news and travel websites and online radio.

Taxi Regulations

749. **Deputy Nicky McFadden** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath is entitled to transfer their vehicle and taxi plate to their child; if he will outline the areas of regulation that deal with vehicle and licence transfer; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9851/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Alan Kelly): The regulation of the taxi industry, including issues pertaining to the transfer of small public service vehicle (SPSV) licences, is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) under the provisions of the Public Transport Regulation Act 2009.

Since January 2009 SPSV licences, including vehicle licences for taxis, wheelchair accessible taxis, hackneys, wheelchair accessible hackneys and limousines, have been issued on the basis that they are non-transferrable. Licences issued prior to that date can be transferred only once.

The Taxi Regulation Bill 2012 provides for a prohibition on the transfer of all SPSV vehicle licences, in line with Action 14 of the Taxi Regulation Review Report 2011. The underlying principle for the prohibition on transfer is that a licence should determine a person's suitability to carry out a function and it should not have monetary value or be traded on the open market.

I am considering separately the matter of the death of an SPSV licence holder, for example where there is a requirement for continuity of a family business, and I intend addressing this matter in the current leglisation. With regard to the specific subject of the Deputy's question, I have referred the matter to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if a response is not received within 10 working days.

Road Safety Issues

750. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will consider proposals in conjunction with the Department of Justice and Equality to ensure a watchdog type role for the Road Safety Authority to ensure that all drivers who are involved in a serious or fatal collision are tested for alcohol; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [9859/13]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Current legislation is clear in relation to the testing of drivers for the presence of alcohol. No legislative provision has been made for Garda discretion. The Road Traffic Acts provide for the mandatory preliminary breath testing of drivers by the Gardaí in certain circumstances, including collisions where death or injury has occurred. The Acts also provide for the testing of drivers in hospital in circumstances where it is not possible to carry out a roadside test. Enforcement of the legislation is primarily a matter for the Garda Síochána under the direction of the Garda Commissioner.

Rail Services

751. **Deputy Seán Kenny** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will contact the CEO of Iarnród Éireann regarding the immediate steps being taken to improve the audible announcements on Dart and commuter rail services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10001/13]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The issue raised is an operational matter for Iarnród Éireann. I have referred 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.

Driving Licence Issues

752. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the maximum size or weight of a trailer that may be towed on a work vehicle or land tractor by the holder of a category W driving licence who has no other category of licence; if there are restrictions that apply to holders of such licences based on their age; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10042/13]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Regulations regarding new vehicle categories for driver licensing purposes which came into effect on 19 January 2013 are set out in the Road Traffic (Licensing of Drivers)(Amendment)(No.2) Regulations of 2011 (S.I. No. 483 of 2011). These represent the transposition into Irish law of EU legislation, specifically parts of Directive 2006/126/EC.

Category W is defined as 'work vehicles and land tractors'. The Regulations also state that a combination of vehicles consisting of a drawing vehicle in category W shall be considered to be a vehicle in category W. There is no reference to a weight limit. Provided the trailer or drawn component is itself legal, there is therefore no limit set to the weight of such trailer or drawn component which may be drawn by a vehicle in category W. There is a minimum age of 16 for a person to hold a learner permit or licence in category W. This is the only age restriction regarding category W.

Road Network

753. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will request from each of the local authorities the percentage of the annual roads maintenance budget that is spent on payroll; if he will confirm the best practice target; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10118/13]

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. The initial selection and prioritisation of works to be funded is also a matter for the local authority.

My Department's role is the provision of grants with guidelines for their application. Among the guidelines provided to local authorities is a Memorandum on Grants for Regional and Local roads. This memorandum outlines the allowable road worker labour costs which may be charged against the State Road Grants, namely basic pay, overtime, employers' P.R.S.I. contributions and acting up allowance. An overhead charge of 38.5% is also allowed as a percentage

add-on to the basic pay element of relevant road workers/non-officer grades only. This standard overhead percentage includes for superannuation, holiday pay, sick pay and all allowances.

Local Improvements Scheme

754. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport regarding his recent announcement that local authorities could re-establish the LIS scheme, if he will consider establishing revised guidelines in view of the fact that there will be a wide variance from one local authority to another. [10142/13]

755. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will consider providing a specific fund for LIS schemes rather than asking local authorities to provide for this scheme from their existing roads budget, the 2013 scheme announcement came without specific funding and in turn some local authorities did not proceed in many cases. [10143/13]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 754 and 755 together.

The Local Improvements Scheme provides funding for the maintenance and improvement of private roadways which are, in the first instance, a matter for the relevant landowner. 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.

Nothwithstanding the above, the Local Improvement Scheme has been reinstated for 2013. However there is no separate allocation available towards this grant category. Instead local authorities may use up to 7% of their Discretionary Grant towards local improvement schemes should they wish to do so. The local contribution for these schemes has been increased to a minimum of 20% of the total cost of the project. Apart from this amendment the same eligibility rules apply for these schemes as heretofore. If the Deputy has any particular suggestions with regard to guidelines, I would be happy to hear them.

Departmental Agencies Staff Remuneration

756. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide details of the payment of bonuses or other performance related payments and or allowances made to the staff of agencies under the aegis of his Department with a yearly breakdown from 2008 outlining the overall amount paid in each year period and the number of staff that received such payments and or allowances. [10173/13]

757. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide details of payments made to the CEO or equivalent of all agencies under the aegis of his Department including details of any bonuses, pension entitlements or any other remuneration paid to him or her in 2012. [10190/13]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 756 and 757 together.

The detailed information requested by the Deputy regarding CEO remuneration is available in the annual report and accounts of each agency. I can confirm, however, that in the light of stated Government policy no bonuses were paid to the CEOs of the agencies under the remit of my Department in respect of 2012.

The remuneration of staff other than the CEO is a matter for the agencies themselves. I have referred the Deputy's question to the agencies for direct reply on this and also on CEO remuneration for 2012 as the annual reports for that year have yet to be published. If you do not receive a reply within ten working days please contact my private office.

Public Transport Provision

758. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of persons that used each Dublin Bus Night-Link route for the years 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012 and to date in 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10209/13]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The issue raised is a matter for Dublin Bus 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.

Road Projects Contracts

759. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding the motorway service area tranche 2; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10210/13]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): As Minister for Transport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the roads programme. The implementation of individual national road projects, including the provision of service areas, is a matter for the National Roads Authority (NRA) under the Roads Act, 1993 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. More specifically, Section 54 of the Roads Act 1993 provides for the NRA to develop service areas on the national road network.

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.

Parking Provision

760. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to implement park and ride facilities in the Howth, County Dublin and Dublin 13 areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10214/13]

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. Following the establishment of the National Transport Authority (NTA) in December 2009, the implementation and development of integrated and accessible public transport infrastructure as well as the promotion of cycling and walking as a means of transport in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA), comes under the remit of the NTA. Noting this 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.

Driving Licence Applications

761. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on correspondence regarding the delay in issuing driving licences (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10258/13]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The substance of this question, namely the operation of the driver licensing system, is a matter for the Road Safety Authority. I have therefore referred the Deputy's question to the Authority for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a reply has not been received within ten days.

Public Transport Provision

762. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will request Bus Éireann to reinstate the discontinued bus service at Kinnegad, County Westmeath, in view of the fact that the withdrawal of service is causing inconvenience to many in the area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10274/13]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The provision of bus services is an operational matter for Bus Eireann in conjunction with the National Transport Authority (NTA) 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.

Driving Licence Issues

763. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will put a compensation plan in place for photographers, small shops and businesses, which have suffered loss of income as a result of the awarding the driver photo ID business contract to the National Driver Licence Service, and as some of them have invested thousands of pounds in equipment, that will now be useless; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [10275/13]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The centralised national driver licensing system under the Road Safety Authority (RSA) came into effect on 12 January 2013.

The new system involves three outsourced elements, a card production facility, a front office for engaging with the customer, and a back office to process applications. All three are overseen by a specialist unit based in the RSA itself. The card licence is standardised across the European Union and therefore there must be consistency in the quality and standard of information used. The photograph on licences will be digital and will not be stuck on to the card in the way it was for the old paper licence. The capture of the photograph is included in the fee for the licence. As the system develops, the SAFE2 ID standard will be implemented, at which point the only option will be the digital photo taken at the Front Office Network.

At present, and until September of this year, driver licence applications, including the nonditigal photographs, will continue to be processed by Motor Tax Offices. Thereafter the new standardised digital photographic requirements will come into effect. The system that comes into place at that stage will be of significant benefit to consumers, as the processing will take place at the new front office centres will have longer open hours than under the current arrangments and will also be open on Saturdays. Furthermore, consumers will only be required to make one journey to get their license and won't be required to make a seperate journey to have a

photograph taken, and one fee will cover the license and this will include the photography costs.

I have no plans to provide compensation for such individuals as proposed by the Deputy. It should be noted that they can still use their equipment for photographs for other forms of identification.