

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 10, inclusive, answered orally.

Human Rights Issues

11. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views regarding the hosting of the 2014 Winter Olympics in Russia; his views on the human rights legislation currently in place in the Russian Federation; the actions he has taken to raise these concerns with his Russian counterpart; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41195/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): The 22nd Winter Olympic Games will be held in the Russian city of Sochi from 7-23 February 2014. As the Deputy will be aware, and as was the case with previous Olympics, the awarding of these Games was a decision of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), rather than of national governments. Respect for diversity and inclusiveness are, of course, an integral part of the Olympic ideal and I would very much like to see this reflected at the Games in Sochi. The IOC is in ongoing contact with the Russian government regarding recent legislation relating to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex persons (LGBTI) and any possible implications for athletes or spectators at the Sochi Games.

My own views on the legislation referred to are very well-known in this House and elsewhere. I have made LGBTI rights a Human Rights priority and am firmly committed to combating discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity. As I made clear earlier today, I strongly disagree with the legislation which, while purporting to protect young people, is more likely to result in the further stigmatisation and, indeed, criminalisation of LGBTI young people. This position has been conveyed by my Department to the Russian Chargé d'affaires and I have undertaken to raise the matter at my next meeting with a Russian Minister.

I understand that the IOC has received written assurances from Russian officials there will be no discrimination at the Sochi Games. I would strongly encourage the Russian authorities to continue to provide robust assurances to the IOC and to the wider international community that the human rights and dignity of all participants and spectators, regardless of their sexual orientation, will be scrupulously respected including freedom of expression and freedom of association and assembly.

Overseas Development Aid Provision

12. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the current situation in respect to the commitment to overseas development aid. [41066/13]

17. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he remains committed to the 0.7% of GNP target for overseas development aid to be achieved by 2015; if provision will be made to make further progress towards this target in budget 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41191/13]

54. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will confirm that, considering Ireland's aid promise is made as a percentage of our national income, when the Government speaks of consolidating the overseas aid budget, he is referring to consolidating not the euro amount, but the ODA-GNI percentage. [41150/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Joe Costello): I propose to take Questions Nos. 12, 17 and 54 together.

The Government is committed to Ireland's overseas aid programme. This commitment was expressed and enhanced by the publication earlier this year of our new Policy on International Development, "One World, One Future", which clearly sets out our vision for a sustainable and just world, and our goals and areas of focus for the coming years. It also reaffirms the centrality of the aid programme to our foreign policy. The new policy states clearly our commitment to achieving the UN target of providing 0.7% of Gross National Product (GNP) for Official Development Assistance (ODA) when economic circumstances permit.

Over the past two years, the Government has broadly stabilised the budget for development assistance - a significant achievement in the context of the very difficult conditions facing the country. For 2012 Ireland provided almost €629 million in ODA, representing 0.47% of GNP. For 2013 the Government has allocated a total of €622 million in ODA. These very significant allocations of public funds are evidence of a consolidation of the development assistance budget and represent a genuine investment on behalf of the Irish people in assisting those less fortunate than ourselves.

The Estimates process for Budget 2014 is now well under way. The Budget will be framed in the context of the Government's overall fiscal consolidation strategy. Departmental budget allocations for 2014 will be a matter for Government decision and will be announced in the Budget Statement.

Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership

13. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the progress to date in the trade talks between the EU and the US; in view of the trade remit of his Department the particular role he and his Department have in these discussions at European Union level; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41214/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): Considerable preparatory work by the Irish EU Presidency and intensive discussions at the EU Trade Council on 14 June – under the chairmanship of the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation - led to agreement on a mandate for the European Commission to formally launch negotiations on a Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). This ranks amongst our most important Presidency achievements. The first round of negotiations took place in Washington in the week beginning 8 July 2013 and represented a positive initial exchange of views and a useful clarification of respective positions. Intensive contacts in different areas have continued during the summer, paving the way for substantial discussions at the second round, to be held in Brussels next week.

The EU and the US, two of the world's largest trading blocs, already have very strong trading and investment ties. The conclusion of a Free Trade Agreement with the US would have a

significant and positive impact on trade, resulting in new markets for Irish and for other European exporters and bringing positive effects on job creation and competitiveness. A comprehensive deal on areas such as common regulatory standards and investment rules holds massive potential for economic growth and jobs which it is estimated could over time boost EU GDP by 0.5% per annum and help create approximately 400,000 jobs in the EU.

While the lead Department for the coordination of Ireland's interests in EU trade policy is the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, the negotiations are being followed by all relevant Government departments including my own Department which has lead responsibility for bilateral relations with the United States and for trade promotion. The United States remains one of our most important trading and investment partners and as such the proposed Agreement has the potential to impact very favourably on Ireland's prosperity, on growth and on jobs, all priorities for the Government.

Undocumented Irish in the USA

14. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the discussions he held in the US recently regarding legislative reforms to assist the undocumented Irish; the current status of plans for an E3 visa; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41178/13]

26. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will provide the details of any meetings he had with US politicians and Irish diaspora groups regarding US immigration reform during his recent visit to New York. [41168/13]

71. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will provide an update on his efforts to progress visa resolution for Irish citizens who live without documentation in the United States. [41056/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I propose to take Questions Nos. 14, 26 and 71 together.

This is an issue I treat with the very highest priority. During my visit to the US last week, I spoke with several key contacts in the US Congress including leading members of the House Judiciary Committee, Minority House Leader Nancy Pelosi, and Chair of the Congressional Friends of Ireland, Pete King. I also met with representatives of Irish community groups as well as some community members who are undocumented. I am acutely aware of the difficulties they face as a result of their undocumented status. I am more determined than ever to continue to work to find a solution to their plight.

A resolution of the situation facing the undocumented Irish in the United States remains a priority for the Government. The Government also attaches great importance to seeking provision for future flows of migration between Ireland and the United States through the extension of the "E-3" visa scheme to include Irish citizens. In this context, we very much welcomed the US Senate's approval of the Border Security, Economic Opportunity and Immigration Modernization Bill by a 68-32 margin on 27 June last. The comprehensive draft legislation, which was drafted over several months by a bipartisan group of eight US Senators, provides for extensive reform of the US immigration system. It includes provisions that would legalise the status of undocumented Irish people and provide a path to permanent residency. It also provides for future flows of legal migration between Ireland and the US via the proposed E-3 visa.

The Bill is a very positive development. Its provisions, if adopted, would help to end the great hardship and uncertainty faced by undocumented Irish in the US and their families here

in Ireland. The inclusion of a new provision to allow several thousand Irish citizens to legally avail of employment opportunities in the US every year is also particularly welcome.

The focus has now shifted to the House of Representatives for its consideration of the issues. It remains to be seen whether a consolidated Bill can be agreed between the Senate and the House of Representatives. It is generally accepted that securing overall agreement will remain a complex and challenging process, particularly at a time when Congress is preoccupied by budgetary and debt issues. This was clear from my discussions last week and I believe the challenge to secure agreement has become even greater in recent times. I am determined to continue to deploy all our resources at political, diplomatic and Irish community level to make progress on this vital issue.

In addition to my contacts last week in New York, I visited Washington DC on 11-12 July and held a series of meetings on Capitol Hill, including with key members of the House of Representatives and Senate, with the US Administration and with Irish-American community representatives. I reiterated throughout all these contacts the Government's interest in all aspects of immigration reform and in particular our interest in seeing an overall agreement reached which provides relief for currently undocumented Irish migrants and a facility for future flows of legal migration between Ireland and the US.

I wish to acknowledge the critically important role being played by a number of Irish community organisations, including the Ancient Order of Hibernians, the Chicago Celts for Immigration Reform and the Irish Lobby for Immigration Reform. I also want to acknowledge the role played by Ambassador Collins and more recently by Ambassador Anderson and staff at the Embassy in Washington who have been steadily building support for our objectives.

Question No. 15 answered with Question No. 10.

Diplomatic Representation Issues

16. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of ambassadors to Ireland that have called to his office since taking office to register an official complaint; and if so the detail of same. [41064/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): My understanding from the Tánaiste is that no Ambassadors have called on him to lodge a complaint since he took up his current office.

Question No. 17 answered with Question No. 12.

International Relations

18. **Deputy Michael Colreavy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the protests in Catalonia on 11 September for self-determination; if he supports the demand of the majority of Catalan people to hold an independence referendum in 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41174/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The constitutional status of Catalonia in Spain is currently the subject of public and political debate in Spain, including in Catalonia itself. As I have previously stated, it is a matter

for the people of any country of the European Union to establish the arrangements for their own democratic governance and it would not be appropriate for me to comment on that process in any particular country.

Overseas Development Aid Issues

19. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the independent audit by the Compliance Advisor Ombudsman published in February 2013 of the World Bank's International Finance Corporation's lending to the financial sector, in particular its concerns over the IFC's use of financial intermediaries and lack of adequate social and environmental safeguards; his view on the audit's findings; and if the findings change the way Irish Aid engages with the IFC. [41170/13]

76. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade in view of the concerns about the World Bank's International Finance Corporation's lending to the financial sector through intermediaries, if Irish Aid has a clear set of criteria on ethical investment which guide its engagement with the Irish private sector and its investment in the global south, or if it plans to develop one. [41171/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Joe Costello): I propose to take Questions Nos. 19 and 76 together.

The International Finance Corporation (IFC), is a member of the World Bank Group, and is the largest global development institution focused exclusively on the private sector in developing countries. The private sector, as an engine of growth, innovation and investment to developing countries, has a major role to play in development. Ireland's membership of the IFC is led by the Minister for Finance as Governor of the World Bank. Ireland has been a member of the IFC since 1958. Through Irish Aid in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Ireland partners with the IFC to support technical assistance and advisory services to the private sector for investment climate reform activities in Sub-Saharan Africa and for fragile and conflict affected states in Africa. The aim of this support is to reduce poverty through inclusive private sector growth. Irish Aid has provided €900,000 to the IFC for this technical and advisory support in 2013. Ireland does not provide financial resources for investments through IFC.

Officials in my Department have taken note of the "Compliance Audit of IFC's Financial Sector Investments" by the Compliance Advisor Ombudsman (CAO) as well as the management response by the International Finance Cooperation. This compliance audit was the first sector wide analysis undertaken by the CAO and provided an independent and fresh perspective on the investment work of IFC. It identified areas for improvements in relation to environmental and social standards by IFC financial Intermediary clients, particularly at a sub-client level.

IFC management have expressed in their management response their openness to further enhance and improve their environmental and social standards and to enhance their engagement with external experts, civil society and other stakeholders. Ireland, through the Minister of Finance, will continue to engage with the IMF and the World Bank to ensure that their structures and processes better reflect the modern world.

With regard to ethical investments by the Irish private sector, Irish Aid has guidelines in place for the Africa Agrifood Development Fund (AADF) which is the only example where Irish Aid funds are used to directly support Irish business. The Fund has adopted internationally validated principles for responsible international investment in agriculture that respect rights, livelihoods and resources. Recipients of AADF funding must undertake to follow these guidelines in their investments and must confirm this in their application for funding.

Human Rights Issues

20. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will restate the position on the alarming increase in violence, discrimination and ill-sentiment against LGBT persons in the Russian Federation, particularly against young persons; if he has communicated this position directly to the Russian ambassador and, if so, if he will share any response he received; if he will indicate the specific measures he is prepared to take to ensure this matter is pursued with the Russian Government at EU and Council of Europe level, including any channels pursued by Irish delegates to last week's Council of Europe parliamentary plenary session on the matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41087/13]

80. **Deputy Patrick Nulty** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will specifically raise with the Russian Government the impact of the potentially homophobic legislation that was passed by the Russian Parliament; and the steps being taken to vindicate the human rights of gay persons in Russia and prevent homophobic violence. [41321/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I propose to take Questions Nos. 20 and 80 together.

I am very concerned over reports of a recent upsurge in violence and ill-will against Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) people in the Russian Federation. In particular, I am aware of deeply disturbing footage which has been circulating on the internet purporting to show young LGBTI individuals being lured to a location only to be violently assaulted. Let me state quite clearly that any acts of violence directed against members of the LGBTI community in Russia, or anywhere else for that matter, are unacceptable and to be deplored.

As I reiterated to the Dáil last month, Ireland is firmly committed to combating discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity. I have put on record our strong disagreement with recent Russian LGBTI-related legislation. As I said, such legislation, while purporting to protect young people, is more likely to result in the further stigmatisation and, indeed, criminalisation of LGBTI young people. My Department has made our position known to senior officials at the Russian Embassy in Ireland. I, myself, have not spoken to the Russian Ambassador but it is my intention to raise the matter at my next meeting with a Russian Minister.

In the meantime, I have asked officials in my Department to actively engage on this issue in various international fora and explore what avenues can most effectively be pursued in voicing our concerns, including with our partners in the EU. For example, with other like-minded partners, Ireland was instrumental in ensuring that the EU statement at the 24th Session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva on 17 September contained a strong reference to our serious concerns over Russian LGBTI legislation. The statement called on the Russian Federation to strive for greater inclusiveness and tolerance for minorities in Russian society.

Discussions continue within the EU on how best to ensure that our concerns are kept firmly on the agenda of the Union's structured dialogue with Russia. That dialogue includes specific consultations on Human Rights with Russian officials, the next round of which should take place this autumn. Ireland will continue to participate actively in the EU's preparations for these and other senior-level meetings with Russian representatives.

I presume the Deputy is referring to the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers' Deputies which met last week in Strasbourg. One of the cases on the Committee's agenda was *Alexseyev v The Russian Federation* concerning the prohibition of the Moscow Pride Marches in

2006, 2007 and 2008. Ireland's Permanent Representative to the Council of Europe intervened in the session to restate Ireland's position and to note that respect for the rights and freedoms of LGBTI persons was now an accepted norm across Europe and that society had benefitted from this.

Overseas Development Aid Issues

21. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has read the World Bank-IMF Watch 2013 report from the Debt and Development Coalition Ireland; his views on the recommendations of the report; and if it will inform the positions Ireland will take at the World Bank Group and IMF meetings in October. [41169/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Joe Costello): I am aware of the "World Bank – IMF Watch 2013" report from Debt and Development Coalition Ireland, a grouping of Irish development NGOs which has focused on the burden of debt on developing countries and on issues of resource mobilisation for development.

Ireland has played a strong role internationally in addressing the alleviation of the debt burden on the poorest countries. Irish Aid in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has also engaged regularly with the Debt and Development Coalition Ireland on a broad range of policy issues, particularly during the consultation phase in the preparation of the Government's new policy for global development, 'One World, One Future'. We take the clear view that all development interventions, including those of the International Financial Institutions, should be framed explicitly in the context of sustainable development, inclusive economic growth, poverty reduction, country ownership and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

Ireland strongly supports the ongoing process of reform within the World Bank and the IMF to ensure they can adequately meet the development challenges of a changing world.

Question No. 22 answered with Question No. 9.

Overseas Development Aid Issues

23. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the way his Department is implementing commitments it has entered into as part of the International Aid Transparency Initiative processes. [41149/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Joe Costello): Consistent with Ireland's international reputation for the quality of its overseas development programme, the Government is committed to ensuring that all information related to official aid flows is published in a standardised comparable and open format. We are committed to the implementation of the Busan Partnership for Global Development, one of the commitments of which is to improve the accountability and accessibility of aid expenditure. These commitments are explicitly stated in Ireland's new policy for global development, One World One Future, which was approved by the Government, earlier this year. They are consistent also with the Governments plans for full membership of the Open Government Partnership.

The International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) is a coordinating body established in 2008 to guide all development agencies in publishing aid information. Ireland is now a full member of the International Aid Transparency Initiative. A detailed plan, outlining how Ireland will comply with IATI requirements with respect to aid transparency has been completed. This plan is now being implemented. More information in respect of official aid flows is being made available in consistency with this plan and partner organizations, in receipt of Irish Aid funds

are encouraged to publish their aid information also. This detailed plan has been posted on the Irish Aid website. A dedicated team, with responsibility for overseeing the implementation of IATI commitments has been established, and reports to the Director General of Irish Aid.

US Surveillance in EU Institutions

24. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the reason the European External Action Service still has not received clarification from the United States authorities in relation to alleged surveillance by the United States at European Union offices; the reason he has not received clarification from the United States embassy in Dublin in relation to these allegations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41197/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): Following allegations of US surveillance of European Union institutions earlier this year, the EU has engaged regularly with the US authorities in both Washington and Brussels to seek clarification on the issues raised. An EU-US High Level Expert Group on data protection has been established, where this and related matters are discussed. The EU is represented on this working group by the Commission, the Presidency of the Council and the European External Action Service (EEAS), and the work of the group is ongoing. In addition, the EEAS reported to EU Member States in July that High Representative (HR) Cathy Ashton had raised these allegations with both US Secretary of State John Kerry and with National Security Advisor Susan Rice. I understand that HR Ashton intends to raise EU concerns again with her US interlocutors over the coming weeks. Ireland, through our Permanent Representation to the European Union in Brussels, is monitoring developments on this issue closely.

Ministerial Travel

25. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the official foreign visits he or his Ministers of State have planned to the end of 2013; the proposed dates for these visits; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41199/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): Delivering an intensive programme of Ministerial-led trade missions is a key commitment in the Government's Action Plan for Jobs in 2013. The number of Ministerial-led Enterprise Ireland trade missions conducted with the active support of the Embassy network has more than doubled over the past two years, up from eight in 2011 to eighteen this year. I undertook a political and trade mission to China (Beijing and Shanghai) from 30 July to 3 August 2013, at the invitation of the Chinese Foreign Minister, Wang Yi. The purpose of my visit was to strengthen the high-level political engagement necessary to deliver on the Strategic Partnership Agreement between Ireland and China. I also had a series of engagements focussed on supporting Irish companies doing business in China, promoting Ireland as a tourist destination, and promoting Ireland as the best investment location for Chinese businesses looking to expand in Europe. I will travel to London in November to speak at an Enterprise Ireland Financial Services Networking event.

My colleague, Minister of State for Trade and Development Joe Costello, will lead an Enterprise Ireland Trade Mission to South Africa and Nigeria from 10–16 November. I visited New York from 24 to 29 September to participate in the General Assembly of the United Nations and to deliver an address to that body on Irish foreign policy priorities. The Minister of State for Trade and Development, Joe Costello T.D. also travelled to New York from 21 to 26 September to participate in the General Assembly and attend events relating to the global development agenda. As outgoing Chair-In-Office of the OSCE, I hope to attend the OSCE Ministerial Council in Kyiv, Ukraine in December.

My colleague, Minister of State for European Affairs Paschal Donohoe, is scheduled to attend the plenary of the British Irish Parliamentary Assembly in London on 21 October. He will also represent the Government at the Asia Europe Meeting (ASEM) Foreign Ministers' meeting in New Delhi, India, on 11-12 November, where he will have a number of bilateral meetings and engagements.

My colleague, Minister of State for Trade and Development Joe Costello, is planning an official humanitarian visit to the Middle East 6–11 October. The visit will involve a short stay in Beirut, Lebanon to visit refugee camps hosting Palestinian refugees from Syria. From Lebanon, the Minister of State will travel to the West Bank and Occupied Palestinian Territories where he will monitor humanitarian and development programmes funded by Irish Aid and managed by our Representative Office in Ramallah. In addition, he will accompany the President on a State visit to Central America from 19 October to 2 November. A visit to Uganda later this year is being considered.

I attended an informal meeting of EU Foreign Ministers in Vilnius on 6-7 September, where discussions covered security and defence issues, Syria and the Middle East Peace Process. I anticipate that I will attend EU Foreign Affairs Council meetings in Luxembourg in October, and Brussels in November and December. My colleagues will be similarly engaged on EU matters and will attend meetings as follows:

Minister of State Donohoe

Paris, 7 October, meeting with Minister Repentin

Luxembourg, 13 – 15 October

Luxembourg, 22 October, General Affairs Council

Brussels, 24 – 25 October, European Council

Rome, 28 October, meeting with Italian EU Minister

Athens, 29 October, working lunch

Vilnius, 28 – 29 November, Eastern Partnership Summit

Minister of State Costello

Brussels, 26 – 27 November, European Development Day

Brussels, 12 December, Foreign Affairs (Development) Council

Question No. 26 answered with Question No. 14.

Departmental Expenditure

27. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the costs incurred by his Department in using VIP services at Irish airports during Ireland's chairmanship of the OSCE and the Irish Presidency of the European Council; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41190/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): The service provided by the Dublin Airport Authority facilitates secure and prompt entry and exit from Dublin Airport. This is a necessary security measure for visiting Heads of State and

Government. Such facilities are provided for high-level delegations only. The total cost of services for visiting Ministers and Heads of State and Government provided by the Dublin Airport Authority during Ireland's Chairmanship of the OSCE and the EU Presidency amounted to €209,660. The costs arising in connection with the EU Presidency for all Government Departments/Bodies for meetings convened during the six-month Presidency by every Government Minister and some Ministers of State came to €178,091. Thirteen Ministerial meetings, attended by visiting Ministers from all 27 EU member states, and other high level meetings were hosted in Dublin during the EU Presidency.

All Presidency-related events were conducted in the most cost-effective manner possible, and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade negotiated a reduced rate with the Airport Authority for the duration of the Presidency. Total expenditure on the Irish Presidency across all Government Departments/Bodies is expected to be less than €51 million, or approximately €9m less than the initial budgetary allocation of €60m. This compares with a cost of €110 million for the previous Irish Presidency in 2004. Costs arising in connection with the OSCE Chairmanship amounted to €31,569. The OSCE Ministerial meeting – the largest ever Ministerial meeting held in Ireland – involved fifty visiting Foreign Ministers and their delegations, including US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, British Foreign Minister William Hague, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and the UN Envoy to Syria, Lakhdar Brahimi.

Cost of Services, Dublin Airport

Chairmanship of OSCE	Presidency of EU Council
€31,569	€178,091

Foreign Conflicts

28. **Deputy John Halligan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will condemn the closure of Gaza from both the Israeli and Egyptian sides, which has resulted in a severe shortage of medicine and medical disposables entering the Gaza Strip and which combined with electricity shortages has placed nearly one thousand patients at risk of death; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41183/13]

70. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the case of Wael Abu-Sada, a 40 year old Palestinian citizen who died of a serious illness on 23 September 2013 after he was prevented from travelling through the Rafah crossing between the Gaza Strip and Egypt for medical treatment in Jordan; if he will raise this case with the Egyptian and Israeli Governments and encourage them both to lift the illegal blockade and siege of Gaza. [41154/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I propose to take Questions Nos. 28 and 70 together.

As the Deputy is aware, I have consistently called for the end of the restrictive measures imposed on the border crossings into and out of Gaza, which impose many hardships on the people of Gaza but paradoxically strengthen the control there of Hamas and other militant groups. The terms under which the Rafah border crossing to Egypt operates are restricted by the agreement between Israel and Egypt under which the Sinai was returned to Egypt, but it has at times acted as an important safety valve when conditions in Gaza have demanded it. Unfortunately, due to the turmoil in Egypt, including serious security problems in the Sinai and a belief by the Egyptian authorities that weapons and fighters are entering Egypt from Gaza, controls on the Rafah crossing have tightened considerably in recent months.

The health system in Gaza, like all aspects of life, is affected by these various restrictions, inevitably resulting in greater risks to some patients. Medical supplies to Gaza, like all goods, must come in through crossing points whose operation is laborious and often interrupted, and the access of patients to treatments not available in Gaza is likewise complicated. The recent case of Mr. Abu-Sada is a particular example of this. As a Hamas official he would be unlikely to seek treatment in Israel, but it is not clear if this had any bearing on his ability to cross into Egypt. I have no independent details of the particular circumstances of his case.

It should be noted that numbers of patients from Gaza are treated in Israeli hospitals, which also indeed treat patients from the West Bank and even, recently, from the fighting in Syria. This is despite the fact that Israel considers both Gaza and Syria to be hostile territories, from which it is subject to attack. Some patients have also been transferred into Egypt.

I commend those actions. I call for the ending of all restrictive measures on entry into, and out of, Gaza of normal human, commercial and humanitarian traffic. And in the meantime, I would indeed appeal to all relevant authorities, Palestinian, Israeli and Egyptian, to be as flexible and compassionate as they can be in providing for the treatment of persons in need in Gaza, trapped by the forces in conflict around them.

Human Rights Issues

29. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which he in conjunction with his EU and UN colleagues may encourage the new administration in Iran towards a more secular society incorporating a modern attitude to human rights; if it might be found possible for the international community to respond positively in terms of reduction and-or removal of sanctions in return for the adoption of human rights principles and recognition for minorities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41125/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): Iran is an explicitly Islamic Republic with a guiding political role reserved for the clergy, and it is unlikely that its government would respond favourably to encouragement to become a more secular society. However, Ireland and our EU partners will certainly continue to do all we can to encourage a greater respect for human rights in Iran. It is encouraging that the new Government has made some positive signals in that respect. Ireland strongly urges Iran's new President Mr Hassan Rouhani, who has received a strong mandate from the Iranian people, to improve the human rights situation in Iran.

I raised the issue of human rights in Iran in a bilateral meeting with new Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif on 26 September, in the margins of the UN General Assembly session in New York, following an earlier phone contact with him. I particularly expressed Ireland's concerns about Iran's use of the death penalty. In addition, while welcoming the release of several Iranian prisoners of conscience, including human rights lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh, in Iran this month, I strongly encouraged the release of more political prisoners. Indeed, many further practical steps are needed to mark a real change in the human rights situation in Iran. In particular, together with EU partners, I urge President Rohani to immediately end the house arrest of former Presidential candidates Mir Houssein Mousavi and Mehdi Karoubi and to release all those imprisoned for non-violent political beliefs or for belonging to a particular religious minority, such as the Baha'i. Furthermore, in line with the EU's strong position of principle on the death penalty, I reiterate Ireland and the EU's call on Iran to halt all pending executions, and introduce a moratorium on this cruel and inhumane punishment.

I am encouraged by the agreement in principle by HR Ashton and FM Zarif in New York last week to re-launch the EU-Iran Human Rights dialogue in the near future. I hope this renewed dialogue can lead to further actions by the Iranian government to improve the overall human rights situation in Iran.

In March 2013, following a review, the Foreign Affairs Council prolonged the EU restrictive measures against certain individuals in response to serious human rights violations in Iran by 12 months. The Council also added 9 persons responsible for serious human rights violations to the list of those subject to a travel ban and an asset freeze. This brings the number of persons targeted to 87. The Council also decided to subject one entity responsible for human rights violations to an asset freeze. The EU has also banned the export of equipment for monitoring internet and telephone communications. In addition, equipment which might be used for internal repression may not be exported to Iran.

The measures are now valid until 13 April 2014. In deciding whether to increase, maintain or reduce restrictive measures against individuals, the EU will consider the actions of these specific individuals with respect to human rights. These measures should not be confused with the sanctions related to the nuclear issue, which are a separate matter.

Foreign Conflicts

30. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the recent deaths of Palestinian civilians and Israeli soldiers in the West Bank in recent weeks; the knock-on effect this could have on peace talks; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41157/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I have noted with deep regret the continuing toll of casualties in the Occupied Territory, including the deaths of Palestinian civilians and Israeli soldiers in recent weeks. I share the Deputy's concern that there is always a risk that incidents on the ground can derail peace talks, either by sparking further violence or simply making it politically impossible for leaders to continue. Indeed, in both Israeli and Palestinian communities, some people have responded to these deaths by calling for an end to talks with the other side. And behind this perhaps spontaneous and emotional response, there are also, as the Deputy knows all too well from our own experience, some people on both sides who actively want the peace process to fail. It is the role of political leaders to dedicate their efforts to ending the occupation and winning a secure and peaceful future for their peoples. And it is essential that they do not allow themselves to be deflected by incidents whether accidental or malicious, and that they avoid any provocative actions on their own side.

Northern Ireland Issues

31. **Deputy Michael Colreavy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the loyalist violence which erupted during July in Belfast; if he has discussed this issue with political representatives and community representatives in Northern Ireland and his counterpart in Britain; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41153/13]

59. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the discussions he has had with the Northern Ireland Secretary of State and members of the Northern Ireland Executive in relation to violence on the streets of Belfast during the summer months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41216/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I propose to take Questions Nos. 31 and 59 together.

I was deeply concerned at the violence experienced in Belfast this summer. I had direct and frequent contact with the Secretary of State and with the Minister for Justice David Ford over the period and reaffirmed my support on a number of occasions for the Police Service of Northern Ireland and for the Parades Commission. I visited Belfast on 29 August 2013 and had detailed discussions with community leaders in Ardoyne, Carrick Hill, Short Strand and in East Belfast who have faced the a particularly difficult situation this summer. I commended them for their leadership and support for a solution based on dialogue and respect. I commend all those who have shown constructive leadership within their communities in very difficult circumstances.

Work must continue to ease tensions at interface areas and to support the rule of law and the Police Service of Northern Ireland charged with upholding the law. The events of this summer, and the ongoing parades in Ardoyne, point to a need to progress meaningful dialogue further. A constructive starting point for any discussion is agreement that the broad consensus on the right to parade is, like all fundamental rights, subject to limitation and must be balanced against the right to freedom from sectarian harassment and discrimination. Meaningful, sustained dialogue between parade organisers and residents' groups must be an essential aspect of achieving the right balance. Everything else flows from those principles.

I again urge the Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland, and all Loyal Orders, to promote and to engage in dialogue based on the principle of respect with residents' groups. I welcome the talks which have now begun under the independent Chairmanship of Richard Haass and the commitment by the Orange Order to engage with that talks process.

Human Rights Issues

32. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his position in relation to the case of former Prime Minister of Ukraine, Ms Yulia Tymoshenko; the steps that are being taken with colleagues at international level to negotiate the release of Ms Tymoshenko. [41058/13]

82. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which the international community continues to monitor the observation of their human rights entitlements by the authorities in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41382/13]

83. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which the international community continues to engage with the authorities in the Ukraine with a view to ensuring the human rights entitlement in respect of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41383/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I propose to take Questions Nos. 32, 82 and 83 together.

I am on record in Dáil expressing concern over the ongoing detention of the former Prime Minister of Ukraine, Yulia Tymoshenko and refer the Deputy to my statement of 26 June last. I raised the matter most recently with Ukraine's Foreign Minister, Leonid Kozhara, during our bilateral meeting last week on the margins of the UN General Assembly in New York.

Concerns repeatedly expressed by Ireland and its EU partners were reinforced by the judg-

ment of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) on 30 April 2013, which ruled that Ms Tymoshenko had been unlawfully detained. As the Deputy is aware, High Representative Catherine Ashton and Commissioner Stefan Füle issued a joint statement in response to this judgment, which urged the Ukrainian authorities to reconsider Ms Tymoshenko's imprisonment and to implement fully all rulings of the ECHR. I fully support this statement.

The EU's position is as set out in the Conclusions of the 10 December 2012 Foreign Affairs Council and in the joint statement of the EU-Ukraine Summit of 25 February 2013: that Ukraine must address convincingly three key areas including the issue of selective justice if progress is to be made towards signature of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement at the Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius in November. While Ukraine has taken some positive steps since, including the release of former Interior Minister Yuriy Lutsenko in April, Ireland would very much like to see further progress made by the Ukrainian authorities that would make signature of the Association Agreement possible, including, crucially, on the issue of selective justice. A positive step on Ms Tymoshenko's imprisonment would be extremely helpful and send a powerful signal in that regard.

The European Parliament's monitoring mission to Ukraine, which is led by the former President of Poland, Aleksander Kwaśniewski, and the former President of the European Parliament, Pat Cox, has been engaging actively with the Ukrainian authorities to resolve all areas where the EU has expressed concern, including the area of selective justice. The monitoring mission met with Ms Tymoshenko last month and is expected to report to the European Parliament later this month.

Overseas Development Aid Provision

33. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will provide further details on his Department's recent pledge of €3 million in funding to mother and child nutrition; the person who will receive the funding; the way it will be spent. [41156/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Joe Costello): Maternal and child malnutrition is a scourge in our world. Under-nutrition causes the deaths of over 3 million children every year and 165 million children under five years of age suffer from stunting and lack the nutrients they need to develop their full potential. Combating global hunger and under-nutrition is a key pillar of our foreign policy and our overseas development assistance programme. Ireland was a founding supporter of the Scaling Up Nutrition or SUN movement, a global movement to tackle under-nutrition, especially maternal, infant and child under-nutrition.

At the SUN global gathering meeting held en marge of the UN General Assembly last week, I outlined Ireland's continuing commitment to address maternal and child malnutrition. I announced €3 million in funding to increase vulnerable families' access to nutritious foods, to boost agricultural productivity and to raise awareness of the benefits of breastfeeding and good early nutrition. This funding will be directed to three programmes: a joint donor financing mechanism, established this year and managed by the international NGO, CARE International, to support Zambia's national programme to prevent stunting in early childhood by targeting the first one thousand days of a child's life from pregnancy to the age of two, a critical window for growth and development; the Alive and Thrive initiative to improve infant and young child nutrition by increasing exclusive breastfeeding rates for infants up to six months of age and by improving feeding practices; and the Global Agricultural Food Security Programme, managed by the World Bank, which aims to make lasting, transformative improvements in food security through increasing the agricultural productivity and incomes of poor farmers.

This support underlines our continuing commitment to improving the lives and futures of poor women and children in developing countries and will ensure that Ireland remains a leader in addressing world hunger and under-nutrition.

International Relations

34. **Deputy John Browne** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the engagement he has had in efforts to improve relations between Iran and the United States; if he has any particular proposals in relation to progressing relations between the two states; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41188/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I am strongly supportive of recent efforts by both sides to improve U.S.-Iran relations. President Obama has on a number of occasions made clear his willingness to open a new chapter in relations with Iran. And in recent weeks we have heard some measured and encouraging words from President Rouhani and other members of his new government. In this cautiously hopeful atmosphere, President Obama spoke by telephone with Iranian President Rouhani on 27 September, the first conversation between the two countries' leaders since 1979.

I myself met with new Iranian Foreign Minister Zarif on 26 September and, in a wide-ranging discussion, very much encouraged the new opening for more productive engagement between Iran and the international community. I have consistently emphasised that while the issues surrounding Iran's nuclear programme are of serious international concern, progress in addressing these can only be achieved through diplomacy and negotiation.

US Secretary of State John Kerry also met with Foreign Minister Zarif at a Ministerial-level meeting of the E3+3 (Germany, France and the U.K. plus the U.S., China and Russia) on 26 September in the margins of the UN General Assembly session in New York. I welcome the fact that this meeting was a substantial and positive one. The Iran nuclear issue remains one of the biggest stumbling blocks to better relations between Iran and, not only the U.S., but also the EU and the wider international community. I fully support the statements of Secretary Kerry and EU High Representative Ashton following this meeting, which emphasised that the current political opening must be translated into a practical, time-bound framework that is implemented on the ground. Iran and the E3+3 and Iran have agreed an early date of 15 and 16 October for their next meeting, in Geneva. This will be an important test of Iran's willingness to truly engage this time around.

The US, the E3+3 and other EU member states including Ireland fully acknowledge Iran's right under the Non-Proliferation Treaty to nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. However, under the terms of the NPT, Iran must not engage in a nuclear weapons programme, and must cooperate fully with the safeguards system of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) as a means of verifying the exclusively peaceful nature of its programme. Iran currently stands in breach of a succession of UN Security Council and IAEA resolutions concerning its nuclear programme. In its report of November 2011 on the implementation of IAEA Safeguards in Iran, the Agency concluded that there are strong grounds for serious concerns regarding possible military dimensions to Iran's nuclear programme while also indicating that Iran had carried out activities relevant to the development of a nuclear explosive device.

I very much hope that Iran will now be ready to address the many legitimate questions which the international community has asked regarding its nuclear programme and to address also the concerns about possible military dimensions to that programme without any further delay. There is no doubt that the Iranian people would be the main beneficiaries of the better

economic and political relations with the wider international community, including the E.U. and the U.S., that would follow the prompt and peaceful resolution of the nuclear issue.

Human Rights Issues

35. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the continued widespread human rights abuses by the Bahraini regime; the recent announcement of an Arab Court of Human Rights to be based in Bahrain when it is established; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41159/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): The overall human rights environment in Bahrain continues to be of serious concern. Ireland shares the concerns recently expressed by the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights regarding the deep polarization of society in Bahrain and the harsh clampdown on human rights defenders and peaceful protesters. Such actions continue to make a durable political solution based on reconciliation and dialogue more difficult to secure.

I have ensured that Ireland's concerns on human rights issues in Bahrain have been conveyed regularly to the Bahraini authorities and I will continue to do so. Ireland was one of 47 member states who participated in a joint statement expressing serious concern over the human rights situation in Bahrain at the current session of the UN Human Rights Council on 9 September. In the statement, the signatories expressed their concern regarding the protection of human rights in Bahrain and called on the Government to expedite the implementation of the recommendations received from the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry in this regard.

In June, the Secretary General of my Department met with senior officials in the Bahraini Ministry of Human Rights while visiting Manama, during which he urged the need for dialogue and reconciliation as well as full respect for human rights.

I am aware of the decision adopted by Arab League ministers meeting in Cairo on 1 September establishing an Arab Court of Human Rights and of Bahrain's subsequent offer to host the court, once it is established. Details regarding the full remit of the court or how it will operate have not yet been made available.

I very much hope that any Arab Court of Human Rights that is eventually established will contribute to more effective promotion and protection of human rights in the region and in Bahrain in particular. It should be established in accordance with international standards and provide redress for all victims of human rights violations. It equally seems clear that any steps taken by Bahrain to fulfil its international human rights obligations could only enhance its suitability and credibility as a location for the court. Officials in my Department will continue to closely monitor its development.

Diplomatic Representation Issues

36. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on Israel's accusation that European diplomats, including the deputy head of Ireland's diplomatic mission in Ramallah, engaged in provocation following a confrontation between the diplomats and Israeli soldiers in the West Bank; the engagement he has had with his Israeli counterpart; if he is satisfied with the current relationship between Ireland and Israel; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41203/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): On 20 September Israeli forces prevented an emergency delivery of international humanitarian aid to

the Palestinian community of Makhul, whose homes had been demolished by Israeli authorities. The delivery was organised by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, and was accompanied as observers by diplomats from Ireland, France, Sweden, Spain, UK, Greece, Australia, Brazil and the EU Delegation. The aid itself, including tents for temporary shelter, was confiscated, leaving the members of the community to spend a further night on the hillside with no shelter for themselves or their animals. I would emphasise that both the destruction of their homes, and the subsequent impeding of humanitarian assistance, are breaches of international humanitarian law. Unfortunately, such illegal actions have been carried out repeatedly, in order to clear Palestinians off the land.

Ireland subscribes fully to the EU statement issued by High Representative Ashton and Commissioner Georgieva on 21 September in which the EU deplored the confiscation of humanitarian assistance intended for the citizens of Khirbet al-Makhul and underlined the importance of unimpeded delivery of humanitarian assistance and the applicability of international humanitarian law in the occupied Palestinian territory. The supply of humanitarian assistance to people who have been made homeless, and the presence of diplomats to observe that humanitarian action, cannot possibly be considered a provocation.

Ireland will continue to engage with our Israeli interlocutors at political and official level to support a more constructive and sensible approach, to encourage the many strands of Israeli opinion who also deplore such actions, and to build on those other areas where we enjoy good and productive relations.

Question No. 37 answered with Question No.9.

Syrian Conflict

38. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which it has been found possible, together with the international community, to convince the authorities in Syria to allow the various aid agencies provide the urgently required assistance to the civilian population who have been major victims in the conflicts there; if any progress has been made towards enforcement of no-fly corridors or safe havens whereby international relief organisations might be facilitated in their efforts to assist; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41126/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Joe Costello): The conflict in Syria has resulted in a humanitarian crisis of unprecedented scale. Flagrant violations of International Humanitarian Law and widespread human rights abuses have tragically become the norm inside Syria, with the lack of protection afforded to civilians being of huge concern. The number of fatalities is now in excess of 100,000 and there are currently almost 7 million people in need of emergency humanitarian assistance, many of whom are children. Fear and uncertainty have forced more than 2.1 million Syrians to flee to neighbouring countries, with well in excess of 4 million people displaced from their homes within Syria's borders. Ireland's total support in response to this humanitarian crisis is now almost €11 million. This makes Ireland one of the most generous contributors in the world to the humanitarian response on a *per capita* basis.

As the Deputy is no doubt aware, inside Syria, excessive controls on aid agencies working in the country, the fragmentation of the armed opposition and the intensity of military confrontations have made the operating environment extremely volatile and insecure. Restrictions imposed by the Assad regime, combined with logistical constraints and increasing insecurity, have made it very difficult to reach many areas of Syria where large numbers of civilians are

in desperate need of humanitarian assistance. There are currently reports of more than half a million people trapped in rural Damascus in need of urgent assistance. Ireland reiterates the call of the UN's Emergency Relief Coordinator, Valerie Amos, in calling on all parties to agree to pauses in hostilities to allow humanitarian agencies immediate and unhindered access to evacuate the wounded and provide life-saving treatment and supplies in areas where fighting is ongoing, while civilians must be allowed to move to safer areas.

In this complex situation, it is highly unlikely that options such as humanitarian corridors would be effective. I share the caution of the United Nations' humanitarian agencies, the Red Cross/Red Crescent movement and many of our other partners in respect of the calls for military intervention in support of humanitarian action. Such intervention could have the result of placing extremely vulnerable civilians and aid workers at further risk. I believe that negotiated access remains the most effective approach.

Notwithstanding our reservations on the establishment of humanitarian corridors, there are other measures which, if implemented, could reduce the impediments to humanitarian access. Ireland fully supports the UN's demands for the free passage of medical supplies, the demilitarisation of medical facilities; the prior notification to civilians/aid convoys of military offensives; the designation of priority humanitarian routes to allow safe passage of aid convoys; the use of humanitarian pauses in fighting to allow humanitarian access to people; and the use of cross-border operations, where appropriate.

Moreover, with the attention of the world now clearly focused on Syria, and positive developments underway in relation to removing the threat of chemical weapons and restarting the political dialogue process, Ireland wants to ensure that this window of opportunity is also used to address the most pressing humanitarian challenges related to humanitarian access.

Humanitarian Aid

39. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will provide further details on his Department's recent pledge of €2 million in emergency assistance for Sudan and South Sudan; the person who will receive the funding; and the way it will be spent. [41165/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Joe Costello): In July, I announced €2 million in funding to provide access to life-saving food, shelter, basic health care and water for very vulnerable conflict-affected communities in Sudan and South Sudan. Some 8.5 million people are in need of urgent humanitarian assistance in both countries. Ongoing conflict has forced people to flee their homes and has denied them access to essential services, particularly in border areas between Sudan and South Sudan. This funding was channelled through the United Nations Common Humanitarian Funds (CHF) for Sudan and South Sudan. Common Humanitarian Funds are country-based pooled funding mechanisms which provide early and predictable funding to NGOs and UN agencies in order to respond to critical humanitarian needs. CHFs enable Humanitarian Country Teams on the ground to swiftly allocate resources where they are most needed, and to fund priority life-saving projects as identified in a Consolidated Appeal Process or a similar humanitarian action plan. The Common Humanitarian Funds in Sudan and South Sudan have enabled UN agencies and NGOs to contribute to a timely and effective humanitarian response as well as to promote and facilitate durable solutions for affected populations.

In Sudan, the majority of the most vulnerable populations are in Darfur, where approximately 3.5 million people currently receive food aid, including some 1.4 million sheltered in

camps for internally displaced persons. In South Kordofan and Blue Nile States, the United Nations estimates that there are currently over 300,000 people displaced or severely affected by the conflict. Already in 2013, the Common Humanitarian Fund has disbursed over \$60 million to UN agencies and NGOs to provide basic services in the areas of shelter, water and sanitation, nutrition and education to these populations. Ireland's donation to the Sudan Common Humanitarian Fund in July has brought our total contribution for 2013 to €2,500,000. Our funding is saving lives every day.

In South Sudan, violence-related incidents continue to drive humanitarian needs in 2013. Conflict intensified in Jonglei State and the tri-state areas of Lakes, Unity and Warrap. In Unity and Upper Nile States, new arrivals have pushed the number of refugees to over 190,000 and humanitarian organisations have had to establish new refugee camps in these two states. The South Sudan Common Humanitarian Fund has allocated some US\$90 million towards access to food, health, nutrition, water and sanitation, education and protection in highly vulnerable areas. In addition, the Fund has proven to be an invaluable mechanism for pre-positioning of emergency relief ahead of the rainy season. Ireland's donation in July brought our total contribution for 2013 to €2,500,000 and is largely funding provision of emergency food assistance to conflict-affected populations.

International Agreements

40. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will work at EU level to impose the Chemical Weapons Convention on the Middle East. [41176/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): Ireland has always supported the universalisation of the Chemical Weapons Convention and we will continue to encourage the six states which have not ratified or acceded to it (Israel, Egypt, South Sudan, Angola, North Korea and Myanmar) to do so as quickly as possible. The EU, through its Strategy on Weapons of Mass Destruction endorsed by the Council of the European Union on 9 December 2003, has also given strong support to universal accession to the Chemical Weapons Convention and has provided substantial financial assistance to the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons to that end.

Humanitarian Aid

41. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the progress he has made in positioning Ireland, in particular Shannon Airport, to be established as an international hub for the storage and distribution of emergency humanitarian supplies; the actions he has taken to progress this aim; the further actions he will take; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41210/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Joe Costello): The Programme for Government set out the Government's desire to position Shannon Airport as an international hub for the storage and distribution of EU and UN emergency humanitarian supplies. Following consultations with the airport management and other local stakeholders, a full-scale feasibility study of the proposal was initiated in 2012, with the specific aim of providing an independent, evidence-based assessment of the viability and value-for-money of a possible humanitarian hub at the airport.

In November 2012, I met with the independent experts tasked with preparing this study. In

presenting the results, they outlined that they had explored a number of options for Shannon Airport – including the repositioning of relief items, the repositioning of medical supplies, the possible development of a training facility at the airport and the establishment of a depot for civil protection assets. The study concluded that the various roles explored did not demonstrate sufficient economic viability in relation to the development of Shannon Airport in the manner which was envisaged under the Programme for Government. This conclusion was based on a cost-benefit analysis and is the result of consultation with a large number of international humanitarian organisations and agencies and potential end users of such a hub.

On the basis of the findings that there was no justifiable, economically viable rationale for advancing the plans to develop Shannon Airport in this manner, the decision was taken not to proceed. This decision, along with the feasibility study, has been publicly available on the Irish Aid website since December 2012.

Human Rights Issues

42. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the disappearance of Sombath Somphone, a prominent activist for sustainable people-centred and just economic and social development, in Laos; evidence that indicates the Laotian security forces may have had a hand in his disappearance; and if he will raise the issue with the Laotian Government and his European and international counterparts. [41161/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Joe Costello): I can assure the Deputy that I am aware of and am very concerned at the circumstances surrounding the disappearance of Sombath Somphone. Ireland's diplomatic relations with Laos are maintained on a secondary accreditation basis from our Embassy in Hanoi. I have instructed the Ambassador to monitor the situation closely and to use every possible opportunity to convey my concerns to the Government of Laos.

The Embassy in Hanoi has maintained very close contact with the United Nations Resident Coordinators Office (UNRCO) and other Embassies in Laos about this case. Most recently, Embassy officials met with the UN Resident Coordinator for Laos in Hanoi on 19 September to discuss Mr. Sombath's case. The UNRCO has reported that there is no new information on the whereabouts of Mr. Sombath, but that they are continuing to pursue the matter with the Government.

The Embassy is also working closely with the EU delegation in Laos which has been very active in raising this case with the Government on behalf of the member states of the EU and HR/VP Catherine Ashton issued a statement on behalf of the EU in December, 2012 expressing serious concern about the disappearance of Mr. Sombath. The EU also delivered a formal demarche to the Minister of Foreign Affairs on 1 February 2013 and, during the EU-Laos Human Rights dialogue on 4 February 2013, Mr. Sombath's situation and that of other Persons of Concern was raised with the relevant Laos authorities.

The European Parliament adopted a resolution on Mr Sombath's case on 7 February this year calling on the Laotian authorities to end the practice of arbitrary arrests and secret detention and to make enforced disappearance a criminal offence. The Parliament also called on the Laotian Government to ratify the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. The case was again raised with the Laotian authorities during a visit by Members of the European Parliament to Laos last month.

As a member of the UN Human Rights Council, Ireland has identified the promotion and protection of Human Rights Defenders as a priority and we will continue to work actively with our partners on these important issues throughout our term at the Council including on this particular case.

White Paper on Defence

43. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the recently published Green Paper on Defence; if he foresees any policy changes relating to the ‘triple lock’ arrangement covering Irish Army involvement in peacekeeping missions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41193/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): The White Paper on Defence, which is expected to be published by the Minister for Defence next year, will provide a framework for Ireland’s defence policy for the period 2014-2024. There have been significant changes in both the domestic and the international security and defence environment since the last White Paper was published in 2000.

The publication of the Green Paper on Defence, and the related consultation process, provides an important opportunity for reflection on how Ireland can address emerging challenges and changes in the international security environment in this period in line with our interests and values. It will also allow for informed public debate in this important policy area. As outlined in the Green Paper, issues relating to security and defence are inseparable from the State’s wider foreign policy, tied to such factors as our traditional policy of military neutrality, our commitment to the UN, and our membership of the EU. My Department has had an opportunity to contribute to the development of this Green Paper, in particular to the significant foreign policy elements of the text, and will continue to do so in the lead-up to the publication of the White Paper next year. I am strongly committed to maintaining the ‘triple lock’ mechanism, which forms the essential foundation for the participation of Irish military personnel in overseas operations. The ‘triple lock’, which enjoys overwhelming public support, has served the State well. It ensures that our Defence Forces take part only in missions which have the consent of the international community, expressed through the authorisation of the United Nations. I do not consider that the Ireland’s contribution to international peacekeeping is constrained in any significant way by this requirement. Furthermore, a UN mandate is vital if a peacekeeping mission is to be effective in achieving its goals.

Diplomatic Representation Issues

44. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has met the Syrian Ambassador to Ireland this year and the discussion that took place. [41063/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): There is at present no Syrian Ambassador accredited to Ireland, following the departure of the last non-resident Ambassador from London in March 2012. Nor have there been any recent contacts with Syrian diplomatic representatives based at their Embassy in London.

International Terrorism

45. **Deputy Seamus Kirk** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his response to the recent terrorist attack on Nairobi’s Westgate mall in Kenya; if he has liaised with Irish Aid workers and Irish charities based in Kenya; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41202/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): The Government condemns in the strongest possible terms the terrorist attack at the Westgate Shopping Centre in Nairobi which, so far, is known to have left 72 people dead, and over 200 people injured. I would like to express my deepest sympathies to the families of the deceased and injured. As I stated while the attack was still happening, Ireland, along with our EU partners, stands in solidarity with the government and people of Kenya at this most difficult time.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has closely monitored the situation as it has developed, through our Embassy in Dar es Salaam and our Honorary Consulate in Nairobi. Throughout this period our Honorary Consul has been in direct contact with a wide range of contacts in Nairobi, including the local Directors of Irish NGOs including Concern, Trócaire and Goal. He was also in touch with Irish Business contacts, the Kenya-Irish Society and others across Nairobi to establish if any Irish were caught up in this terrible tragedy. My Department also received offers of assistance from Irish business engaged in Kenya to help in responding to the tragedy as it unfolded, which was greatly appreciated. Most fortunately no Irish citizens were the victims of this terrorist attack. However, tragically, the son of the former Kenyan Ambassador to Ireland, Catherine Mwangi, and his fiancée, both lost their lives. On behalf of the Government I have extended our deepest sympathies to the Ambassador and her family.

The Somali Al-Shabab terrorist group has claimed responsibility for the attack, which underlines the impact the continuing instability in Somalia is having on the wider Horn of Africa region. The EU is implementing a comprehensive Strategy for the Horn of Africa which was adopted in 2011 and which covers the entire region, including Somalia. It addresses all dimensions of the situation including conflict, underdevelopment, and issues related to governance and human rights. Kenya is a key regional leader in the African led efforts to assist Somalia on its long journey to national recovery.

The EU's support in the area of security includes funding for the African Union peacekeeping mission, and direct engagement through a number of Common Security and Defence Policy Missions including the EU Training Mission, EUTM Somalia, which is building the capacity of the Somali National Security Forces to enable them to take over responsibility for security and law and order. Ireland is providing the Commander for EUTM Somalia, as well as a significant contingent of personnel.

We will continue to work with our partners in the EU and in Africa to tackle the impact of instability in the Horn of Africa region and to help build a peaceful, secure future for its people.

Millennium Development Goals

46. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will provide more details on the UN special event on the millennium development goals that he attended in New York; and the way it will impact on the post-2015 development discussions. [41162/13]

73. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade as co-chair of the forthcoming UN summit on the future of the millennium development goals, if he will seek to make decent work one of the main targets of the post-2015 development era; his views on whether decent and safe labour and environmental standards are a fundamental right that must be fought for throughout the rapidly industrialising global south; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41054/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Joe Costel-

lo): I propose to take Questions Nos. 46 and 73 together.

Ireland has been playing a very significant international role in the process to negotiate and agree a new framework for global development after 2015, the target date for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). It was a major achievement of our EU Presidency in the first half of this year to secure agreement on an integrated EU position for the Special Event at the United Nations in New York last week.

The Tánaiste addressed the opening session of the MDG Special Event and co-chaired one of the four roundtable discussions on progress under the MDGs and future challenges in the fight to end global poverty and hunger.

Ireland and South Africa were asked to co-facilitate the Special Event and we negotiated overall agreement on a strong outcome document, which was endorsed by all UN member states. It provides a clear commitment to maximising progress over the next two years under the MDGs and a roadmap for the negotiation of a new global development framework post-2015. This marks another important step in the post-2015 process by committing to completing the work of the MDGs, to freeing the world of poverty and hunger, and ensuring a life of dignity for all. We believe that there is now a strong basis for the negotiation of a new development framework which can help eradicate extreme poverty and hunger in a generation, empower women and girls, focus on equitable economic opportunity and integrate international efforts to address poverty and the impact of climate change.

I agree that issues related to employment and decent and safe work, are critical to poverty eradication and sustainable development. Very limited progress has been made on the MDG target to achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all, including women and young people. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), unemployment has increased by 28 million since 2007, and an estimated 39 million people have dropped out of the labour market, leaving a 67 million jobs gap as a result of the global economic and financial crisis. There are currently approximately 200 million unemployed people and approximately 868 million 'global working poor'. Young people have borne the brunt of the crisis.

Ireland has already expressed support for a stand-alone goal on employment and decent work. This position is in line with our new global development policy, 'One World, One Future', which includes a commitment to promote the inclusion of job creation objectives into the national plans, poverty reduction frameworks and budgets of the Key Partner Countries for our aid programme.

Departmental Appointments

47. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of honorary consuls he has appointed; the names and occupations of the honorary consuls appointed; where these honorary consuls have been appointed; the criteria that is required for such an appointment to this position; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41208/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I have appointed seventeen Honorary Consuls as follows:

Year of Appointment	Location	Name of Honorary Consul	Occupation
2013	Kenya,- Nairobi	Mr. Jonathan Andrew Sutton	Businessman
2013	Botswana, Gaborone	Mr. Paul Gerard Sullivan	Businessman

Year of Appointment	Location	Name of Honorary Consul	Occupation
2013	Kazakhstan, Almaty	Mr. Kairat Mazhibayev	Businessman
2013	Turkey, Antalya	Mr. Mehmet Seckin Arkan	Lawyer
2013	Canada, Nova Scotia	Mr. Brian Doherty	Businessman
2013	Australia, Perth	Mr. Martin Kavanagh	Lawyer
2013	Nepal Kathmandu	Mr. Manoj Bahadur Shrestha	Company Chairman
2013	USA Florida	Mr. Terence Delahunty	Lawyer
2012	Japan, Sapporo	Mr. Seiji Kasama	Company CEO
2012	Saudi Arabia, Jeddah	Mr. Mohammad Ahmad Naghi	Company Chairman
2012	Turkey, Izmir	Mr. Bulent Akgerman	Businessman
2012	Iran, Tehran	Mr. Alireza Feizollahi	Businessman
2012	USA Las Vegas	Ms. Teresa Murphy	Businessman
2012	USA, Honolulu, Hawaii	Mr. Noel Trainor	Businessman
2011	Bahamas	Mr. Brian Quinn	Businessman
2011	Pakistan	Mr. Osman Asghar Khan	Businessman
2011	India, Chennai	Mr. Rajeev Mecheri	Businessman

Appointments of Honorary Consul are made if a need is identified for consular assistance or services to Irish citizens, or in some locations, with assistance in the promotion of Trade. In general the Irish Ambassador accredited to a country will make a proposal for the appointment of an Honorary Consul if s/he identifies a specific need and has also identified a suitable candidate or suitable candidates. The main criteria considered when appointing an Honorary Consul include familiarity with the local Irish Community, familiarity with the local administration, a good knowledge of the local laws particularly in areas which have a consular dimension and a good knowledge of the local language.

Humanitarian Aid

48. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the proposals he has to provide additional humanitarian aid to Syria and adjoining countries; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41219/13]

57. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the level and type of humanitarian assistance provided by the State to Syrian citizens to date affected by the ongoing conflict in Syria; and the policy of the Government in relation to the Syrian civil war. [41057/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Joe Costello): I propose to take Questions Nos. 48 and 57 together.

The tragic crisis unfolding in Syria and in neighbouring countries has resulted in enormous humanitarian needs requiring an urgent response from the international community. With the number of fatalities surpassing 100,000, there are now close to 7 million people who are in need of immediate life saving support. In addition to more than 4 million people who are displaced within Syria, some 2.1 million Syrians have fled the violence to take refuge in neighbouring countries, one million of whom are children. The Government has repeatedly condemned the civil war in Syria and the violations of human rights inflicted on the Syrian people.

In line with the UN's humanitarian response plan for Syria, it is imperative that life-saving emergency assistance is provided and essential basic services are delivered to affected people in Syria and its neighbouring countries, especially food, water, sanitation, health, shelter, education and essential non-food items. Vital public services, particularly medical facilities, affected by the crisis must be restored. The effect of this crisis on children is particularly worrying, with large numbers of children being exposed to violence, exploitation, abuse and neglect.

Ireland's total contribution to this crisis to date stands at €10.8 million, of which €8.15 million has been provided in 2013, making Ireland one of world's most generous donors – on a *per capita* basis – to respond to this crisis. The total includes support to the NGOs Goal, Oxfam, Concern and the International Rescue Committee, as well as to members of the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement and six different UN agencies. These are partners that have a demonstrated track record of effective humanitarian response in Syria, with strong strategies for targeting and delivery of assistance and robust systems for monitoring and accountability.

My officials are continuously monitoring the evolving situation in Syria and the surrounding region, and my proposed visit to Lebanon next month will provide an opportunity to review the relief effort and assess humanitarian needs on the ground. In view of the immense needs in Syria and neighbouring countries hosting Syrian refugees, Ireland will continue to provide assistance, within our means and as the situation evolves, to the humanitarian response.

Foreign Conflicts

49. **Deputy John Halligan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the fact that a large sewage treatment plant being constructed in Gaza with funding from the World Bank may not become operational due to a shortage of required electric power, and that an appeal for more electricity made to Israel has been ignored; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41184/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): The new sewage treatment plant in Gaza is critical infrastructure to protect public health, and especially to prevent the total contamination of Gaza's groundwater, from which all drinking water is drawn, by sewage leaking from the existing inadequate facilities. The future operation of the plant is a matter of speculation, but it is clearly essential that it become fully operational as soon as possible. The position in relation to electric power is somewhat more complicated than suggested in the question. Mains electricity supply in Gaza is partly supplied directly by Israel, as a normal commercial transaction, and partly generated by the Gaza power plant. The power plant in turn depends either on fuel supplied by the Palestinian Authority via Israeli controlled border crossings, or smuggled in from Egypt. These two sources were already inadequate to meet all of Gaza's needs, and power cuts have been endemic for some years. In recent years, however, the situation has worsened considerably. The Hamas authorities in Gaza have purchased less power from Israel, either because they wished to be less dependent on Israel or because it was more expensive. At the same time, however, they have refused to pay the Palestinian Authority for the fuel it supplied, with the result that the PA ended supplies. The end result has been an increased reliance on fuel smuggled in from Egypt, which comes through the tunnel system controlled and taxed by Hamas, and so provides them with revenue.

The recent turmoil in Egypt, and particularly strong Egyptian measures to control the border and reduce smuggling, has reduced this source of fuel supply on which Gaza has become over-reliant, and threatened further power cuts. I am not certain that Israel has in fact been asked to supply more power, or if so under what terms.

The power supply in Gaza, and in due course the operation of the new sewage plant when it becomes operational, are of course of critical importance for public health. I urge all relevant authorities, and not just in Israel, to take appropriate steps to meet this need.

United Nations Issues

50. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will provide an update on the work his Department has done with Ireland's seat on the UN Human Rights Council; the issues it is prioritising; and if he will provide regular updates to Oireachtas Members of the ongoing work of this Council. [41164/13]

74. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the contribution Ireland has made in general sessions of the Human Rights Council of the United Nations, the most recent of which concluded on 27 September; the number of Irish officials representing the country on the Council; and the dialogue between the Government and the representatives in raising human rights issues in this important forum. [41097/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I propose to take Questions Nos. 50 and 74 together.

Ireland's membership of the United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC) presents an opportunity to enhance our reputation internationally and to make a meaningful contribution to the promotion and protection of human rights. During Ireland's three year membership of the HRC, which runs from 2013-2015, we are actively working to add value to the work of the Council and strengthen the institution itself.

Ireland's approach to membership of the HRC is guided by the pledges and commitments made during our campaign to secure election which reflect our well-established human rights priorities. These include the following: Defending the universality of human rights; Freedom of expression (particularly on the internet); Freedom of religion or belief; LGBTI (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex) rights; Peace building and conflict resolution; The human rights situation in the Middle East; Strengthening the UN Human Rights Treaty Body System; The promotion and protection of human rights defenders; The promotion and protection of an enabling environment for civil society; Women's rights, combating discrimination and Gender-Based Violence. We are also highlighting the importance of ensuring that human rights considerations underpin all areas of development – with a particular focus on health, education and combating hunger.

Ireland held the Presidency of the Council of the European Union for the first six months of this year, which encompassed the March and June sessions of the Human Rights Council. As Presidency, Ireland played an active role in the HRC as part of the Joint EU Team, together with the EU Delegation (EEAS). In the March session, I personally delivered the general statement on behalf of the EU on a number of country situations and thematic priorities. Over both sessions, the joint EU Team, which included the Irish delegation, led in the preparation of drafts and the conduct of negotiations on the EU-led initiatives including DPRK, Belarus, Burma/Myanmar, Freedom of Religion or Belief and Rights of the Child. Ireland worked in tandem with the EEAS on resolutions relating to Sri Lanka, Mali, Syria, Libya, Eritrea, Middle East, human rights defenders, combating religious intolerance and illicit funds. Ireland also negotiated four further resolutions on behalf of the European Union on national human rights institutions, discrimination against women, cultural rights and foreign debt.

Ireland led on two important initiatives during the September session, which concluded last

Friday. As part of our commitment to ensuring that our human rights priorities and development programme are mutually reinforcing, Ireland led on a resolution on preventable mortality and morbidity of children under five which was adopted by consensus on 26 September. Some 6.6 million children under the age of five die each year, mainly from preventable and treatable causes. This resolution focuses on how the HRC can act in elaborating a human rights based approach to this issue and support the much needed engagement of the human rights community in the ongoing efforts to strengthening accountability for children's health. As a result of the adoption of this resolution, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights will elaborate technical guidance, in close consultation with the World Health Organisation drawing on the particular expertise of that agency, and with the participation of all relevant stakeholders, including Governments. This technical guidance, grounded in human rights principles, can help national Ministries and other actors to design policies and programmes to reduce and eliminate under-five mortality.

Ireland also led on a resolution on creating and maintaining a safe and enabling environment for civil society which was adopted on 27 September. Civil society actors have come under increasing pressure in many parts of the world in recent years. In some countries, dialogue with civil society remains limited and the space for civil society engagement is narrow or shrinking. Restrictive legislation and repressive practices in some countries have led to stigmatisation, harassment, and even criminalisation of civil society actors engaged in promoting and protecting human rights. The resolution adopted last Friday underlines the important contribution of civil society and calls on States to create and maintain a safe and enabling environment in which civil society can operate effectively. It also provides for a panel discussion to be held during the next session of the Human Rights Council in March 2014 on the challenges facing States in their efforts to ensure space for civil society, and lessons learnt and good practices in this regard.

Ireland has also made national statements at the most recent session of the HRC on human rights situations in a number of countries, including Egypt, Syria, Sri Lanka, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Sudan, and Somalia. We have also raised important issues such as the safety of journalists, children affected by armed conflict, and the role of civil society in integrating gender perspectives in the work of the HRC.

Ireland will continue to respond proactively to emerging human rights situations and themes, including emergency situations, and to play an active role in the Council's three yearly sessions (March, June and September) and in the sessions of Universal Periodic Review (UPR) examinations, during which countries' human rights records are examined. Ireland will continue to promote and defend the work and independence of the human rights treaty bodies, the Human Rights Council special procedures and the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. The Permanent Mission of Ireland to the United Nations in Geneva is responsible for the management of day-to-day activity on the Human Rights Council. A team of three diplomats and two interns work in support of the Permanent Representative of Ireland to the UN in Geneva to deliver on our priorities for our membership term. My Department is in close daily contact with the Permanent Mission in Geneva in this regard, with input from other government departments within their areas of responsibility. Officials in my Department would be prepared to provide regular briefings to members of the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trade on our engagement with the Human Rights Council as appropriate.

Human Rights Issues

51. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and

Trade if he has contacted the Russian Government and if not, if he will give a commitment to contact the Russian Government regarding the appalling conditions faced by Nadezhda Tolokonnikova of the Russian punk group, Pussy Riot, who has gone on hunger strike at what she calls gulag like prison conditions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41181/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): As the Deputy is aware, three members of the Russian music band ‘Pussy Riot’ were sentenced to prison terms of two years on 17 August 2012 following the performance of a satirical song in a Moscow cathedral in February 2012. While the sentence of one band member was subsequently suspended on appeal, the court upheld the custodial sentences imposed on the other two members, Maria Alekhina and Nadezhda Tolokonnikova. The imposition of lengthy prison terms on the two women, both of whom are mothers, is a matter of great regret and deep concern. While their actions may have given rise to offence in some quarters, the sentences appear out of proportion. This is particularly so as Ms Alekhina and Ms Tolokonnikova had spent five months in custody prior to sentencing.

The EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Catherine Ashton, has urged the Russian authorities to review and reverse the sentences in line with Russia’s international obligations in regard to respect for freedom of expression. I strongly support those views. In recent days, worrying reports have emerged in the media concerning the conditions in which Ms Tolokonnikova is serving her sentence. These reports appear to be based on an open letter in which Ms Tolokonnikova announced that she was going on hunger strike last week in protest at what she alleges is a brutal, inhumane and degrading regime at the prison. While we are not in a position to substantiate the detailed allegations which she has made in her letter, I would urge the authorities to initiate a dialogue with Ms Tolokonnikova or her representatives without delay and to fully investigate the issues which have been raised. I have asked officials in my Department to keep me closely informed on further developments in this case and to examine what actions might be taken together with our EU partners to signal our concerns to the Russian authorities.

Foreign Conflicts

52. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on whether a US military strike on Syria will bring further hardship on its citizens; and if he would advocate that the EU refuse to support such a military strike. [41177/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): Ireland has long held the position that only a political solution can bring peace to Syria. I have repeatedly stated my belief that further militarisation is unlikely in any way to contribute to a solution of the conflict or lessen the suffering of the Syrian people. I have also consistently opposed the supply of weapons to all sides of the conflict and continue to do so. The EU has repeatedly called for a negotiated end to the conflict, a position reaffirmed in the discussions on Syria which took place at the informal meeting of EU Foreign Ministers in Vilnius on 7 September which I attended.

Northern Ireland Issues

53. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the proposals he has to have further discussions with the Northern Ireland Secretary of State and members of the Northern Ireland Executive on the need to progress the proposal to establish a

civic forum; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41217/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): In my ongoing contacts with the Secretary of State and with the Northern Ireland Executive, including in the context of the North South Ministerial Council, I have pressed for the re-establishment of the Civic Forum as a valuable and, as yet, unimplemented provision of the Good Friday Agreement. In my address to the British Irish Association on 7 September, 2013, I pointed out that Northern Ireland was currently facing many difficult issues and that it was neither sensible nor realistic to expect the political system to shoulder these on its own. I have previously put on the record of the Dáil that I support the establishment of a Civic Forum which would provide for a broad range of voices on community relations and stimulate informed public debate in relation to key societal challenges. I welcome the extent to which Richard Haass, Independent Chair of the All-Party Group on Parades, Flags and Emblems and the Past, has encouraged groups and representatives of wider civil society to contribute ideas to the talks process.

I will be hosting a Reconciliation Networking Forum event in Dublin Castle in October 2013 for people who are involved in community, peace-building, public policy or reconciliation work, to discuss what civil society, including the community sector, can and should do to meet the reconciliation challenges ahead. This is in line with the view of the Government that a strong and resilient civic society can play an important role in building a more reconciled and prosperous Northern Ireland.

Question No. 54 answered with Question No. 12.

Overseas Development Aid Issues

55. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the Danish Government is publishing a strategic framework for Danish involvement in EU development policy in October; and if his Department has plans to produce a policy paper which explicitly states the reason and the way Ireland spends aid via the EU. [41148/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Joe Costello): Last May, the Government launched Ireland's new development policy "One World, One Future" setting out the vision, goals and priorities for our overseas aid programme over the coming four years. The new policy, which was published following a very extensive public consultation process, reaffirms Ireland's strong support for multilateral efforts, recognising that global challenges require global solutions. Our membership of the EU, which provides over 50% of global development aid, enables our collective development efforts to have greater impact and reach. Given the EU's central role in international development, we recognise the value of influencing EU policy and are playing our part in ensuring that the EU continues to deliver aid that is effective and assists those most in need.

The new policy also commits Irish Aid to reviewing the range of our funding for multilateral organisations, including the EU, to ensure that it is as effective as possible and that it is fully aligned with our goals. In the context of carrying out this review, we will be drawing on the body of recent work carried by international partners including the Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN) and the strategic framework for Danish involvement in EU development which I understand is being published today by the Danish Government.

Last year, Ireland contributed €99.6 million to the EU development budget through as-

essed contributions of €29.2 million to the European Development Fund, which covers African, Caribbean and Pacific countries and €70.4 million to the EU's general budget, which broadly covers development co-operation in other regions of the world.

Northern Ireland Issues

56. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will provide an update on his Department's engagements with Dr. Richard Haass in September 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41147/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I met with Richard Haass in New York last week to discuss his work and the issues that he has been asked to address by the Northern Ireland Executive. The meeting followed an earlier conversation with him on 13 September last. Our discussions provided a valuable opportunity to hear his considered view on the talks process and to get his assessment of the way forward. I had met the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on 23 September, and I stressed to him that both governments are determined to maintain and build on all the hard-won progress which has been achieved in Northern Ireland and that Richard Haass and Meghan O'Sullivan and their team have the full support of the Government in the task that lies ahead.

Following my visit to Belfast on 29 August, I was particularly glad to hear of the wide process of consultation with civic society undertaken by Dr Haass and Dr O'Sullivan. A broad spectrum of people, who are not part of the political process, need to be heard in relation to these difficult societal issues. Civil society has an important role to play in determining the best way forward. I look forward to close contact with Dr Haass and his team over the coming months, and I hope to welcome him to Dublin during his next round of discussions.

Question No. 57 answered with Question No. 48.

Foreign Conflicts

58. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the plight of the five fishermen (details supplied) who have been sentenced to one year imprisonment by an Egyptian court for fishing in Egyptian waters in a desperate attempt to feed their families; if he will raise the issue with his Egyptian counterpart and urge for their immediate release; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41182/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I refer the Deputy to my earlier reply to Question No. 8 (PQ41155/13) on this topic, which was as follows: I have consistently called for the end of all restrictions on movement in and out of Gaza, and will continue to do so. I have also commented on the specific restrictions placed on fishermen. Even though the limit enforced by Israel has been extended from 3 to 6 miles, this is still very restrictive, and the local exhaustion of stocks caused by overfishing in a very restricted area has led to the collapse of Gaza's fishing industry, which is an important source of food. In recent years Gaza fishing boats have often sailed to Egyptian ports to buy fish, instead of catching it. Egyptian controls on movement into Gaza are partly dictated under the terms of the agreement with Israel by which the Sinai was restored, and partly by security concerns concerning infiltration of militant groups and weapons into Egypt from Gaza. I have encouraged Egypt to allow movement to and from Gaza as much as possible.

In recent months however those security concerns have been very much heightened, lead-

ing to tighter controls, and Egyptian measures against the smuggling tunnels. The Egyptian authorities may likewise fear that fishing vessels may be used to smuggle weapons into Egypt. I cannot comment on whether the recent case of vessels from Gaza fishing inside Egyptian waters was accidental or not. Egyptian sovereignty over their own territorial waters is not an element of the blockade of Gaza, and I do not propose to intervene in this case. However, I would certainly encourage a compassionate and lenient response from the Egyptian authorities to these fishermen, given the terrible pressures on their livelihoods in Gaza.

Question No. 59 answered with Question No. 31.

Foreign Conflicts

60. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the upcoming legal trials of Basque political activists; his views on whether they could have a negative effect on the Basque-Spanish peace process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41175/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): Policy on the placement and treatment of a country's nationals in prison in the European Union is a matter for the democratically elected government and the relevant competent authorities in each Member State in accordance with domestic, European and international law, and, as such, it would be inappropriate for me to become involved in the matter in question. As I have stated previously, the Government continues to support and encourage all efforts that are aimed at securing a definitive peace in the Basque Country.

EU Directives

61. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the progress he has made in creating a mechanism across Government to accelerate implementation of European directives, involving relevant Departments and the Attorney General's office; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41211/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): The timely transposition of EU Directives is a priority for the Government. The Government has established an Interdepartmental Committee on EU Engagement (ICEE) to ensure active oversight of progress by Departments in transposition and implementation of EU legislation. The Committee is also charged with examining and improving overall working methods and the exchange of best practice in handling transposition cases. The Committee is chaired by the Minister of State for European Affairs and is attended by senior official representatives of all Government Departments, the Offices of the Attorney General and the Parliamentary Counsel and the Houses of the Oireachtas Service.

We have a much-improved record in the transposition of EU Directives since this Government took office. Much of the improvement is down to the work of the ICEE in proactively engaging with Departments on an ongoing basis in order to accelerate the implementation of EU law. In 2003, for example, Ireland's transposition deficit stood at 2.4%, well above the EU average. This placed us seventh out of 15 Member States in terms of transposing EU Directives on time.

By December 2012, we had achieved a zero% transposition deficit score in the Internal Market Scoreboard as a result of transposing all Directives on time. We were only the second Member State to achieve this level of compliance since the Scoreboard was first compiled in 1997. We have since achieved a score of 0.3% - much better than the EU-wide average of 0.6% - in the most recent, May 2013, Scoreboard.

The work of the ICEE is a concrete example of the proactive and forward thinking engagement on EU matters which is a priority for the Government, and I wish the Committee continued success in its work.

Foreign Conflicts

62. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if the ongoing conflict in the Congo has been discussed at recent EU Foreign Affairs Council meetings. [41215/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): The situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and the Great Lakes region was discussed at a meeting of the EU Foreign Affairs Council on 22 July, which I attended. At that meeting the Council adopted comprehensive Conclusions in support of the ‘Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the DRC and the Region’, which had been concluded in Addis Ababa on 24 February in the presence of the UN Secretary General. The Council Conclusions also welcomed the appointment of UN Special Envoy, Mary Robinson, to oversee the implementation of the Framework Agreement. The Council noted that these measures and other regional efforts constitute a window of opportunity that must be seized. The European Union will continue to pursue a strategic and comprehensive approach to the crisis in DRC, working through political and diplomatic engagement, development cooperation programmes, and support for the United Nations peacekeeping operations. The EU is also pursuing security sector reform programmes, through the EU Common Security and Defence Policy missions in the DRC. Ireland will also continue to play a constructive role. So far in 2013, Ireland has provided €3.8 million in response to the humanitarian crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. This assistance is being channelled through the UN, international organisations, and our NGO partners.

We have also funded two recent high level events in support of mediation efforts with the involvement of Special Envoy Mary Robinson. These events focussed on encouraging the participation of women in the implementation of the peace Framework. We will continue to examine ways in which we can support the implementation of the Framework Agreement.

Human Rights Issues

63. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the steps he will take in response to the statement from the Council of Europe’s human rights chief, Nils Muiznieks, on 11 September 2013, stating that countries like Ireland, which colluded with the kidnapping and torture of terror suspects by the CIA, must investigate and atone for their actions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41059/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I have clearly stated on numerous occasions that the use of Irish airspace and airports for extraordinary rendition operations has not, and will not, be permitted under any circumstances. The current Programme for Government states clearly that this Government “will enforce the prohibition of the use of Irish airports and related facilities for purposes not in line with the dictates of international law”. Ireland does not tolerate, and will not tolerate, the use of our airspace or airports for any illegal purpose, including torture, rendition or the unauthorised detention of any individual. Ireland has cooperated fully with an investigation of the Council of Europe of the various allegations made in regard to secret prisons and extraordinary rendition. Out of forty-six responses received, Ireland’s was one of nine that was adjudged to be sufficiently comprehensive not to require additional clarification.

Recent reports on extraordinary renditions do not provide any new information or evidence to support its assertion that Ireland permitted such activity. In particular, they do not suggest that any person has been subjected to extraordinary rendition through Irish airspace and airports. It has been made clear by the current and previous Governments that such activity would be considered completely unacceptable and illegal by Ireland. I reiterate however that should anyone have evidence to suggest that any person subject to extraordinary rendition has transited through an Irish airport, this evidence should be made available to An Garda Síochána so that an investigation can take place.

Passport Application Fees

64. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if the decreased cost in producing the new passports will result in a reduction in the cost for citizens; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41180/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): Yesterday I launched a redesigned Irish passport that incorporates images of Irish landscape and culture with innovative and enhanced security features. Over the lifetime of the contract for this booklet the average cost of the blank book will be halved. In these current economic times the procurement of an enhanced product from an Irish company at a lower cost to the Irish people is to be welcomed. Passport prices will not be reduced. At present all passport revenues received are returned to the exchequer. Furthermore, the Passport Service needs to replace the software and machinery used in the production of passports, both of which are nearing the end of their service. This will require additional investment over the coming period.

Syrian Conflict

65. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will provide further details on his commitment to provide Irish funding for the destruction of chemical weapons in Syria; the persons that will receive the funding; and the way it will be spent. [41152/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): Last Wednesday, 25 September, I announced that the Government will make a voluntary contribution of €200,000 in support of the destruction of chemical weapons in Syria. This funding will be provided to the trust fund established by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons for that purpose. The practical implementation of the framework agreement brokered by the US and Russia on the destruction of Syria's chemical weapons is to be the responsibility of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. The OPCW is the body established by the Chemical Weapons Convention to oversee its implementation. This is a substantial contribution and it reflects both our commitment to ensuring that Syria's chemical weapons can never again be used, against Syrians or anybody else, and our long-standing commitment to a world free of weapons of mass destruction.

Although the OPCW needs resources immediately to begin the process, the full picture of what is needed will become clearer in the coming days. Implementing the detailed destruction plan, which is to be finalised by 15 November, will clearly require substantial additional resources for the OPCW. Inspection activities to determine the full extent of the challenge and to inform the destruction plan began yesterday. The Government is open to the possibility of providing further assistance, either financial or practical, if it is within our means to do so.

European External Action Service

66. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the recent publication of Review 2013 by the European External Action Service, EEAS, two years after the creation of the body, discussing a range of short, medium and longer term proposals and suggestions for the organisation and functioning of the European Union's diplomatic corps; his views on whether the direction of its being more than a foreign ministry, combining elements of a development and defence ministry is the correct approach for a twenty-first century Europe; if he will outline Ireland's current deployment to the EEAS and detail Ireland's contribution over the first two years of existence of the EEAS; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41060/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): The High Representative's Review of the European External Action Service (EEAS), was circulated to EU Foreign Ministers in late July. Ireland welcomes the opportunity to take stock of the performance of the EEAS following its first two and a half years in operation. The Review was the subject of discussions at the informal Foreign Ministers meeting which I co-hosted, together with Cathy Ashton, in Dublin in March of this year. The Review contains a large number of recommendations, some of which are already being implemented; others will require careful consideration in the period ahead. Ireland, along with other Member States, is currently reflecting upon these recommendations and their implications, which are being discussed at senior official level in Brussels.

Ireland supports a strong EEAS which fulfils the vision set out in the Lisbon treaty of an effective and coherent foreign policy. As such, we welcome the recommendation within the Review which emphasises that development policy expertise needs to be strengthened within the EEAS. Over the longer term, we believe that this has the potential to assist in the more effective integration of development into the EU's overall foreign policy.

The publication of the EEAS Review is also timely and important in the context of the forthcoming European Council discussion on the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). Much progress has been made over the past nine months in reforming planning and administrative procedures which will ensure that the EU continues to develop a comprehensive approach to crisis management, and is in a position to respond quickly and effectively to crises as they emerge. There are currently seven Irish officials from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade serving with the EEAS. This is in line with the commitment to achieve one third representation by diplomats from the Member States in the EEAS and is reflective of Ireland's percentage of the EU population.

Question No. 67 answered with Question No. 10.

Overseas Development Aid Issues

68. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will outline the proportion of Irish Aid which is directed towards efforts to combat climate change, the effects of which are likely to be more intense in the developing world; and the projects operated or supported by Irish Aid. [41096/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Joe Costello): In 2012, over € 33 million of Irish Aid programme funding was directed to actions to address the impact of climate change on developing countries. The Government's new policy for international development, *One World, One Future*, recognises that the majority of the world's

poor are directly reliant on the environment for their survival. We aim to meet our commitments to reducing hunger and poverty by putting the issue of climate change at the heart of our programmes. Reducing the impact of climate change is intrinsically linked to development and our ability to tackle global hunger. We have prioritised reducing global hunger and climate change in our new policy.

Irish Aid supports programmes to adapt agricultural nutritious food production to changing climatic conditions to assure long-term sustainability of food for poor farmer households. Several programmes support the development of integrated farming systems and food crop diversification to maintain a nutritious diet for rural families. Climate adaptation is key to improving the production of sufficient nutritious food and fuel for poor households while sustaining the fertility of the land and maintaining the natural and water resources.

In our key partner countries, Ireland supports sustainable resource management, agricultural research into climate-smart agriculture and conservation agriculture to protect soil fertility and the livelihoods of smallholder farmers and pastoralists. Irish Aid prioritises promoting sustainable development and programmes include funding for social protection schemes, income diversification projects, and projects that promote empowerment of local residents in urban areas on the issues of saving energy, reducing waste and water use.

Irish Aid supports the promotion of solar light and water pumping systems in Ethiopia and energy efficient cookstoves programmes in both Malawi and Ethiopia. We also support a number of countries to increase the accuracy and use of long-term weather forecasts in agricultural planning, and to reduce the impact of disasters on local communities.

Trade Missions Participation

69. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will provide details of his recent four day political and trade mission to China; the discussions he had with Chinese officials; and what is expected to be achieved by the visit. [41167/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I refer the Deputy to my reply to PQ37204.13 on 18 September. I undertook a political and trade mission to China (Beijing and Shanghai) from 30 July to 3 August 2013, at the invitation of the Chinese Foreign Minister, Wang Yi. The purpose of my visit was to strengthen the high-level political engagement necessary to deliver on the Strategic Partnership Agreement between Ireland and China. I also had a series of engagements focussed on supporting Irish companies doing business in China, promoting Ireland as a tourist destination, and promoting Ireland as the best investment location for Chinese businesses looking to expand in Europe. The Strategic Partnership Agreement between China and Ireland was adopted in March last year during the visit of the Taoiseach to China, and extends to all areas of our bilateral relationship including political, diplomatic, trade, investment, agriculture and food, education and tourism.

In the period since it was agreed, there has been impressive progress made in Irish-Chinese relations. Eight Irish Government Ministers have visited China promoting trade and other links. On the Chinese side, there have been visits to Ireland by ten Ministers or other senior figures in the Chinese administration. Irish trade with China is now worth over €8 billion a year, with a strong trade surplus in Ireland's favour.

During my visit, I had a number of high-level political engagements, including with the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Wang Yi; with a member of the State Council, Chairman Yu

Zhengsheng; and with Minister Wang Jia Rui, Minister at the Communist Party International Department. At these meetings, I stressed the potential for increased investment and economic co-operation, and took the opportunity to promote Ireland as an education destination. I also raised the issue of access to the Chinese market for Irish beef. I had the opportunity also to discuss wider political issues, including human rights issues, EU-China relations, and current international developments.

During my visit, I announced that Ireland has secured full market access to China for salmon exports, which represents a sizeable opportunity for Irish salmon exporters, with demand for high-end seafood in China growing substantially each year. This followed intensive negotiations with the Chinese authorities by the Sea Fisheries Protection Authority (SFPA) in conjunction with the Irish Embassy in Beijing. Further, Dublin Airport Authority signed a twinning agreement during my visit to establish a Sister Airports partnership with Beijing Capital International Airport, which will allow the two companies to co-operate to further commercial and tourism links between the two cities. The agreement aims to enable the two airports to engage in a joint marketing initiative to improve airline services between Dublin and Beijing.

I held a number of engagements pursuing key priorities, including exports, food and agribusiness, education, tourism, targeting of investment, and support for Irish companies doing business in China. These included engagements organised by Tourism Ireland, Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland and Bord Bia.

I had meetings with a number of Chinese companies interested in investing in Ireland and potential partners for Irish exporters. These included Shanghai Bright, Huawei, Yanhua, the Bank of Communications and ChinaCache. I addressed approximately one hundred Chinese and Irish partner company senior executives at a business event organised by Enterprise Ireland. This allowed me to present Ireland's key strengths both as an investment destination and as a trading partner. I also witnessed the signing of a number of significant memoranda of understanding, including one between IDA Ireland and the Shanghai Foreign Investment Development Board, which has responsibility for outbound investment.

I attended networking events organised by the Irish Embassy in Beijing and the Consulate General in Shanghai, which provided the opportunity to meet a wide range of official, business and cultural contacts. I addressed a promotional event organised by Tourism Ireland in Shanghai which was attended by over 100 representatives of the Chinese travel industry, including airlines, travel agents, tour operators and media.

While in Shanghai, I addressed the Shanghai Returned Scholars Association, a non-government network of influential senior academics, business people and officials, as well as the graduates of the Ireland-Shanghai Senior Officials Training Programme, which has improved awareness of Ireland and our influence, including on trade/investment-related issues, among key municipal government commissions.

Question No. 70 answered with Question No. 28.

Question No. 71 answered with Question No. 14.

Military Neutrality

72. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has read the recently published Red C Poll, commissioned by PANA, which details Irish persons attitudes to neutrality and the war in Syria; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41151/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I read with interest the Red C Poll to which the Deputy refers, which indicates that 78% of the public supports Ireland's policy of neutrality, a policy to which this Government is fully committed and which will remain a lynchpin of our foreign policy for the foreseeable future. This policy, which is characterised by non-participation in military alliances, is underpinned by a set of complementary values which informs our work on human rights and development, and our efforts to promote disarmament and the elimination of weapons of mass destruction. It is these same values which have motivated Ireland's longstanding record of participation in international crisis management.

As a member of the United Nations, we consider that primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security rests with the UN Security Council. This is reflected within the triple-lock mechanism, which provides that the Defence Forces may only participate in peacekeeping operations which have been authorised by the UN. The triple lock enjoys overwhelming public support, as demonstrated in the Red C Poll, and offers the fullest legitimacy to the contribution which Ireland makes to international peacekeeping. We are furthermore committed to our obligation as members of the UN to provide assistance in any action which the Security Council takes in accordance with the UN Charter. It is in this context that Ireland has responded positively to the recent request to provide personnel for the UN Disengagement Observation Force in the Golan Heights. This mission has made a considerable contribution to stability in the Middle East since its establishment in 1974. As the confrontation between Government and opposition forces in Syria continues, ensuring that UNDOF can continue to operate effectively remains a priority for the United Nations in order to ensure that regional stability is not further threatened by this conflict.

I have repeatedly made clear Ireland's opposition to the arming of the parties to the Syrian conflict, which can only further fuel this war. Ireland remains fully supportive of a negotiated peaceful solution, and urges the parties to the conflict to renew the Geneva II process with a view to ending the current conflict and alleviating the appalling suffering endured by the Syrian people.

Question No. 73 answered with Question No. 46.

Question No. 74 answered with Question No. 50.

Northern Ireland Issues

75. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the proposals he has had to have further discussions with the Northern Ireland Secretary of State and members of the Northern Ireland Executive regarding the proposed bill of rights; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41218/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): The Good Friday Agreement recognizes the need to elaborate the principles according to which society could be protected and flourish and a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland is fundamental to ensuring these principles are given a legislative base. I believe that it is important that all voices are included in the process to formulate a Bill of Rights, most particularly civil society. I have made my views clear to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and will continue to raise the question of a Bill of Rights in my discussions with the First Minister and deputy First Minister. We all have important roles to play if we are to build permanent and lasting peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland. The Government recognizes this and remains fully committed to this process, and to the full implementation of all Agreements which form the foundations

of peace and reconciliation.

Question No. 76 answered with Question No. 19.

Humanitarian Aid

77. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will provide further details on his Department's recent pledge of €700,000 in humanitarian aid to Mali; the person who will receive the funding; and the way it will be spent. [41160/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Joe Costello): Last month, I announced €700,000 in funding to provide life-saving emergency assistance to refugees and internally displaced persons in Mali and to support ongoing efforts by the international community to respond to the crisis and support the recovery process in the country. €500,000 of this funding has been provided to the World Food Programme (WFP), the lead agency for hunger and nutrition in the Sahel region. The funding is supporting the WFP to provide life-saving humanitarian assistance, while at the same time strengthening communities' resilience to face future shocks. Activities being undertaken by the WFP through this funding include food and cash assistance to affected households, supplementary feeding to both prevent severe acute malnutrition and to treat moderate acute malnutrition amongst children, and emergency school feeding. In providing this funding, Ireland is helping to meet the urgent humanitarian needs of displaced households and fragile host communities, across the country but particularly those most affected by the ongoing conflict in the North.

I also approved an allocation of €200,000 to the UN Trust Fund in Support of Peace and Security in Mali, earmarked towards the restoration of constitutional order and national unity, including the conduct of peaceful, credible and inclusive elections. This contribution is part of a comprehensive package of Irish support for the crisis response and recovery process in Mali, which also includes our contribution of personnel to EUTM Mali, our contribution to immediate post-crisis governance needs announced at the Addis Donor Conference in January 2013, as well as the significant levels of humanitarian funding both during and post-crisis.

Undocumented Irish in the USA

78. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the progress to date of the immigration reform bill in the US Congress; the plans he has to advance this initiative with the United States authorities in regard to the position of the undocumented Irish; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41481/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): This is an issue I treat with the very highest priority. During my visit to the US last week, I spoke with several key contacts in the US Congress including leading members of the House Judiciary Committee, Minority House Leader Nancy Pelosi, and Chair of the Congressional Friends of Ireland, Pete King. I also met with representatives of Irish community groups as well as some community members who are undocumented. I am acutely aware of the difficulties they face as a result of their undocumented status. I am more determined than ever to continue to work to find a solution to their plight. A resolution of the situation facing the undocumented Irish in the United States remains a priority for the Government. The Government also attaches great importance to seeking provision for future flows of migration between Ireland and the United States through the extension of the "E-3" visa scheme to include Irish citizens. In this context, we very much welcomed the US Senate's approval of the Border Security, Economic Opportu-

nity and Immigration Modernization Bill by a 68-32 margin on 27 June last.

The comprehensive draft legislation, which was drafted over several months by a bipartisan group of eight US Senators, provides for extensive reform of the US immigration system. It includes provisions that would legalise the status of undocumented Irish people and provide a path to permanent residency. It also provides for future flows of legal migration between Ireland and the US via the proposed E-3 visa. The Bill is a very positive development. Its provisions, if adopted, would help to end the great hardship and uncertainty faced by undocumented Irish in the US and their families here in Ireland. The inclusion of a new provision to allow several thousand Irish citizens to legally avail of employment opportunities in the US every year is also particularly welcome.

The focus has now shifted to the House of Representatives for its consideration of the issues. It remains to be seen whether a consolidated Bill can be agreed between the Senate and the House of Representatives. It is generally accepted that securing overall agreement will remain a complex and challenging process, particularly at a time when Congress is preoccupied by budgetary and debt issues. This was clear from my discussions last week and I believe the challenge to secure agreement has become even greater in recent times. I am determined to continue to deploy all our resources at political, diplomatic and Irish community level to make progress on this vital issue.

In addition to my contacts last week in New York, I visited Washington DC on 11-12 July and held a series of meetings on Capitol Hill, including with key members of the House of Representatives and Senate, with the US Administration and with Irish-American community representatives. I reiterated throughout all these contacts the Government's interest in all aspects of immigration reform and in particular our interest in seeing an overall agreement reached which provides relief for currently undocumented Irish migrants and a facility for future flows of legal migration between Ireland and the US.

I wish to acknowledge the critically important role being played by a number of Irish community organisations, including the Ancient Order of Hibernians, the Chicago Celts for Immigration Reform and the Irish Lobby for Immigration Reform. I also want to acknowledge the role played by Ambassador Collins and more recently by Ambassador Anderson and staff at the Embassy in Washington who have been steadily building support for our objectives.

Undocumented Irish in the USA

79. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has discussed with senior American politicians the likelihood that deportation of all persons who live in the USA without documentation would cost the American exchequer \$285 billion; whether he has emphasised the potential that persons without documentation have to contribute to the American economy; if he will update Dáil Éireann on his engagements on behalf of Irish citizens who live in the USA without documentation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41270/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): This is an issue I treat with the very highest priority. During my visit to the US last week, I spoke with several key contacts in the US Congress including leading members of the House Judiciary Committee, Minority House Leader Nancy Pelosi, and Chair of the Congressional Friends of Ireland, Pete King. I also met with representatives of Irish community groups as well as some community members who are undocumented. I am acutely aware of the difficulties they face as a result of their undocumented status. I am more determined than ever to continue to work

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Question No. 80 answered with Question No. 20.

EU Enlargement

81. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will set out the ongoing progress in respect of European enlargement; the degree to which any particular obstacles have been identified in the process in respect of any potential member; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41381/13]

91. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the degree to which the situation in the western Balkans continues to remain central to future EU enlargement negotiations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41391/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I propose to take Questions Nos. 81 and 91 together.

Enlargement remains one of the European Union's most successful policies, fostering peace, stability and prosperity, and the Western Balkans region remains central to enlargement policy. Already this year, in addition to Croatia's accession, we have seen significant progress in relation to Serbia and Kosovo in particular. In June, under the Irish Presidency, the EU agreed to open accession negotiations with Serbia and to begin negotiations on a Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) with Kosovo. This agreement came in recognition of the progress achieved in the EU-facilitated Belgrade-Pristina dialogue and, in particular, the agreement on principles governing the normalisation of relations between the two countries.

The EU agreed to hold the first intergovernmental conference with Serbia, to officially begin accession negotiations, by January 2014 at the very latest, on the basis of a negotiating framework to be adopted by the European Council later this year. The European Commission is also making preparations to begin negotiations with Kosovo on a Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA), a significant milestone on Kosovo's European path.

Meanwhile, accession negotiations are continuing with Montenegro. Under the Irish Presidency, we opened a new chapter in talks with Montenegro and work is underway towards the opening, later this year, of the two key chapters relating to the judiciary, fundamental rights and justice, freedom and security. In neighbouring Albania, the new Government has made gaining EU candidate status a political priority. The European Commission will, later this month, give its assessment of the reform process in Albania and, on that basis, consider whether Albania could be granted candidate status. In Macedonia, while there have been some positive developments in the domestic reform process and in good neighbourly relations, there has also been negative fallout from the political crisis at the end of last year. We await the European Commission's detailed assessment of the situation and whether, in the Commission's view, enough progress has been made to recommend opening of accession negotiations.

There has been a disappointing lack of progress in the delivery by the leadership in Bosnia and Herzegovina on important reforms, for example, on bringing the constitution into line with a key ruling of the European Court of Human Rights. The EU has made clear the reforms needed in order to realise the country's EU perspective. The EU needs to examine what else can be done to encourage the political leaders of Bosnia and Herzegovina to move forward with reforms. As I have stated before, I believe this can best be done in the context of the review of the mandate of the EU's Special Representative to Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, I would continue to emphasise that while we will do everything in our power to encourage movement on the path to EU integration, this is ultimately a matter for the political leaders of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In relation to Turkey, the accession progress was reinvigorated earlier this year when, under the Irish Presidency, it was agreed to open a new chapter (on regional policy) in accession talks. The opening of this chapter will take place at an intergovernmental conference later this year. Ireland's view remains that greater EU engagement through the accession progress with Turkey is the best way to ensure delivery of reform.

Finally, in relation to Iceland, we note the decision of the Icelandic Government to put negotiations with the EU on hold until an assessment of the negotiations and developments within the EU has been made, and a referendum takes place.

Later this month, the European Commission will bring forward its annual progress report on enlargement. This will provide the basis for discussion among EU member states on the prospects for progress in each case and for the adoption of conclusions at the European Council

in December. Ireland remains a strong supporter of EU enlargement and we look forward to working with each country on their respective European path. As for particular obstacles identified, we have always stated that enlargement is a conditional process; prospective member states must themselves achieve progress on reforms in order to move forward on their EU paths.

Questions Nos. 82 and 83 answered with Question No. 32.

Syrian Conflict

84. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the steps taken by the European Union, United Nations and the worldwide community to intervene in a positive way in the ongoing situation in Syria, with particular reference to the need to safeguard the lives of innocent civilians and children; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41384/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): The crisis in Syria dominated discussions at the UN General Assembly last week which I attended and formed one of the principal themes in my address to the General Assembly on 28 September. I have consistently argued that the UN and the Security Council must be central to any efforts to resolve this crisis and ensure that international law and basic human rights are upheld. Despite the long delay in reaching this stage, I welcome the decisive action the Security Council has now taken on Syria. Full implementation of the provisions for the complete elimination of Syria's chemical weapons and full compliance by Syria with its obligations is now imperative. Ireland has pledged €200,000 in funding to support the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, assisted by the UN, in implementing these arrangements.

The Security Council has also called for the early convening of the Geneva II peace conference, hopefully by mid-November. Syria's conflict can only be resolved politically, not militarily. Peace can only come through all Syrians engaging in a genuine, representative and inclusive process to agree a new political dispensation in their country.

I also welcome the Security Council's clear call for accountability for what has occurred in Syria. I have long called for these crimes to be referred to the ICC which exists precisely for this purpose. Ireland is playing its part in the international effort to meet the massive needs both inside Syria and in the wider region, having contributed almost €11 million to fund relief efforts to date. On a per capita basis, we are one of the most generous contributors in the world to the Syria humanitarian crisis. Ireland has also been consistent in our efforts at EU and international levels to highlight the grave humanitarian dimensions of the crisis and the need for the international community to meet its obligations in providing life-saving assistance to Syria and neighbouring countries. Minister of State Costello will travel to the region in early October to assess the current situation on the ground.

Conflict Resolution

85. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which he and his EU and UN colleagues continually monitor the situation in the Horn of Africa, with particular reference to war, famine and human rights violations; if any particular issue has manifested itself in recent times by way of escalation of the threat to civilians; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41385/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): De-

spite progress on the political and security fronts in Somalia over the past year, the recent tragic events in Kenya underline the complexity of the challenges facing the people and Governments of the Horn of Africa region. I visited the area in July 2012 to see at first hand the situation on the ground, and I have worked to ensure that it remains high on the EU and UN agendas. Current estimates suggest close to 2.5 million people in Ethiopia, 1.1 million people in Kenya, 1.05 million people in Somalia, and over 200,000 people in Djibouti remain vulnerable to food insecurity and require humanitarian assistance. While the influx of Somalis fleeing into the Dadaab refugee camp in north-east Kenya has decreased, it remains the largest refugee camp in the world with some 425,000 refugees.

There are over one million Somali refugees across the region, who depend entirely on humanitarian aid. Continuing instability in parts of southern Somalia remains a major obstacle to the delivery of aid and has serious implications for border regions and nearby refugee camps. We are following the political and humanitarian situation closely, through our Embassies in the region, notably in Addis Ababa, and in close coordination with our international and NGO partners. Together with other donor countries, we have worked particularly closely with the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs to put in place new systems to improve the way in which aid is delivered and to ensure that coordination on the ground is improved through enhanced monitoring systems.

Ireland's direct engagement in the region has demonstrated that emergency assistance can effectively address health, nutrition, and water and sanitation needs, but cannot prevent future crises. Ireland will therefore continue to work on long-term programmes to build resilience and address the needs of the most vulnerable across the region. Ireland has provided over €290 million in development and humanitarian funding to the Horn of Africa since 2007. We will continue to engage actively at EU and international level in pushing for a strongly coordinated approach to the humanitarian situation in the Horn.

The situation in the region is reviewed regularly at meetings of the EU Foreign Affairs Council, which I attend. The EU is continuing to implement vigorously its Comprehensive Strategy for the Horn of Africa which was adopted in 2011 and which covers the entire region including the situations in Somalia, Sudan and South Sudan, Ethiopia and Eritrea, Kenya. It addresses all dimensions on the different crises in the region including conflict, underdevelopment, and issues related to governance and human rights. An over-arching role in implementation of the strategic approach is given to the EU Special Representative for the Horn of Africa, Alex Rondos, who reports regularly to Ministers.

Progress has been made on regional security with the support of the EU Common Security and Defence Policy missions, including the EU Training Mission in Somalia, the EU anti-piracy naval mission, and the regional maritime capacity-building mission, EUCAP Nestor. Ireland is making an important contribution to these EU efforts by providing the Commander and a significant contingent of personnel for the EU Training Mission in Somalia, which is building the capacity of the Somali National Security Forces to enable them to take over responsibility for security and law and order.

The EU also provides very significant humanitarian, development and economic support across the Horn of Africa, in close cooperation with regional bodies, including the African Union. The EU SHARE initiative (Supporting the Horn of Africa's Resilience) has been developed in light of the 2011 crisis as a result of food shortages and conflict, and promotes a strongly integrated approach to vulnerable communities in the region.

Last week, Ireland participated in the debate at the Human Rights Council in Geneva on the situation Somalia and Sudan, and highlighted concerns about human right violations in

both countries, while welcoming the significant progress which has been made in Somalia in particular in the past twelve months. It is clear that progress in the Horn of Africa will require a strong focus on human rights and an enabling environment for civil society. This will remain a priority area for Ireland's engagement with the countries of the region, and internationally.

EU Membership Issues

86. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade about the extent to which he and his EU colleagues have discussed the implications for this country, Northern Ireland, the UK and the entire European Union in the event of the United Kingdom withdrawing from the EU; the extent to which public confidence in the EU project will prevail in the interim period prior to the holding of a UK referendum on the issue; if any particular steps are needed to minimise the damage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41386/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): We and other member states are actively monitoring the issue on an ongoing basis, and continue to discuss it with our UK colleagues. I believe the UK's interests are best served by remaining an influential member of the EU. The EU as a whole is better and stronger with the UK in it. It is also in Ireland's interests that the UK remains a fully committed member. While we disagree on some issues, the UK remains an important ally on many aspects of EU policy, including areas such as trade liberalisation on which we collaborated during Ireland's recent EU Presidency term.

Colombian Peace Process

87. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which the peace process in Colombia remains on course; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41387/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I strongly support the Colombian peace process and hope that ongoing negotiations will bring an end to the long conflict there which has caused much suffering. I welcome progress made to date including the agreement reached last May on the land reform element of the peace negotiations. The timetable for the talks is a matter for the parties involved and I wish them success in reaching agreement on the other important items remaining on their agenda so that a final comprehensive peace agreement can be secured as soon as possible. We in Ireland understand very well the challenges, the opportunities and imperative to peace building and welcome any action taken to spare the Colombian people from violence. We appreciate the responsibility that rests on the parties to these negotiations and wish them success in their work. Ireland will continue to follow closely developments on the talks underway, and to support a negotiated solution to the conflict in Colombia.

Foreign Conflicts

88. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the degree to which the international community has been in a position to intervene in the various conflict zones where child soldiers have been used in combat; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41388/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Joe Costello): The recruitment, use and abuse of child soldiers continues to be a serious problem and a

matter of grave concern to Ireland and indeed the international community. The involvement of child soldiers has been reported in most recent armed conflicts and in almost every region of the world over the last two decades. Each year, the United Nations Secretary-General issues a report on children and armed conflict which lists all armed groups – both state and non-state – that recruit and use children. The most recent list includes 52 state and non-state armed groups operating across three continents. It is estimated that up to 300,000 children continue to be involved in more than 30 conflicts worldwide, including, notably, in a number of internal and regional conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa.

Against this background, international legal efforts to curb the practice of using children in armed conflict have been stepped up significantly. In 1996, the UN General Assembly voted to establish the post of Special-Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, tasked to serve as an independent advocate for the protection and well-being of boys and girls affected by armed conflict. In 1999, the UN Security Council passed its first Resolution (UNSCR 1261) highlighting the impact of armed conflict on children and condemning violations carried out in that context. With the adoption of nine Resolutions and several Presidential statements since then, the Security Council has developed important tools to strengthen child protection and to promote compliance with international standards.

The Optional Protocol to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (OPAC) was adopted by the UN General Assembly on 25 May 2000 and entered into force in 2002. It is considered the core international human rights treaty on child soldiers. It lays out clear standards relating to the recruitment and use of under-18s by state armed forces as well as non-state armed groups which, if fully implemented, provide a strong foundation for long-term prevention of unlawful recruitment and use of children, and for assisting those who have already become involved in armed conflict.

Ireland is a strong supporter of the mandate and the work of the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms Leila Zerrougui. At the most recent session of the UN Human Rights Council of which Ireland is currently a member, Ireland expressed particular appreciation for the work that SRSZG Zerrougui has been carrying out to mainstream child protection in peacekeeping operations. Ireland called on all parties to conflict to comply with international humanitarian law and to respect schools and hospitals as protected civilian objects. Ireland also highlighted the particular challenges for the prevention of recruitment and the promotion of the reintegration of child soldiers in Mali and expressed concern about the difficult situations of children vulnerable to violence and deprivation in Central African Republic and eastern DRC.

Ireland has engaged on this issue in various ways including, crucially, through the core work of our aid programme in addressing poverty and under-development – major root causes of this problem. Ireland has also supported more targeted and specific interventions from supporting agencies such as UNICEF and the International Criminal Court, to designing interventions in our bilateral programmes that address the needs of children affected by conflict. Ireland places strong emphasis on the importance of prioritising protection and accountability at the national and international level. The conviction of Thomas Lubanga by the International Criminal Court last year for the recruitment and use of child soldiers is a powerful message that no individual who violates international criminal law can be confident of impunity.

We remain deeply committed to addressing this issue, as has been recently reflected in Ireland's new Policy for International Development, 'One World, One Future', where we have pledged to increase our engagement on the issue of child soldiers and children in armed conflict. We are actively examining options for strengthened action in this area. Ireland will also continue to encourage all concerned countries to cooperate with UN mechanisms and to ratify the

Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on armed conflict.

Undocumented Irish in the USA

89. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which he continues to be in a position to engage with the US authorities in the context of the regularisation of undocumented Irish in the US; the extent to which agreement has been reached in respect of legislative proposals in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41389/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): This is an issue I treat with the very highest priority. During my visit to the US last week, I spoke with several key contacts in the US Congress including leading members of the House Judiciary Committee, Minority House Leader Nancy Pelosi, and Chair of the Congressional Friends of Ireland, Pete King. I also met with representatives of Irish community groups as well as some community members who are undocumented. I am acutely aware of the difficulties they face as a result of their undocumented status. I am more determined than ever to continue to work to find a solution to their plight. A resolution of the situation facing the undocumented Irish in the United States remains a priority for the Government. The Government also attaches great importance to seeking provision for future flows of migration between Ireland and the United States through the extension of the “E-3” visa scheme to include Irish citizens.

In this context, we very much welcomed the US Senate’s approval of the Border Security, Economic Opportunity and Immigration Modernization Bill by a 68-32 margin on 27 June last. The comprehensive draft legislation, which was drafted over several months by a bipartisan group of eight US Senators, provides for extensive reform of the US immigration system. It includes provisions that would legalise the status of undocumented Irish people and provide a path to permanent residency. It also provides for future flows of legal migration between Ireland and the US via the proposed E-3 visa. The Bill is a very positive development. Its provisions, if adopted, would help to end the great hardship and uncertainty faced by undocumented Irish in the US and their families here in Ireland. The inclusion of a new provision to allow several thousand Irish citizens to legally avail of employment opportunities in the US every year is also particularly welcome.

The focus has now shifted to the House of Representatives for its consideration of the issues. It remains to be seen whether a consolidated Bill can be agreed between the Senate and the House of Representatives. It is generally accepted that securing overall agreement will remain a complex and challenging process, particularly at a time when Congress is preoccupied by budgetary and debt issues. This was clear from my discussions last week and I believe the challenge to secure agreement has become even greater in recent times. I am determined to continue to deploy all our resources at political, diplomatic and Irish community level to make progress on this vital issue.

In addition to my contacts last week in New York, I visited Washington DC on 11-12 July and held a series of meetings on Capitol Hill, including with key members of the House of Representatives and Senate, with the US Administration and with Irish-American community representatives. I reiterated throughout all these contacts the Government’s interest in all aspects of immigration reform and in particular our interest in seeing an overall agreement reached which provides relief for currently undocumented Irish migrants and a facility for future flows of legal migration between Ireland and the US.

I wish to acknowledge the critically important role being played by a number of Irish com-

munity organisations, including the Ancient Order of Hibernians, the Chicago Celts for Immigration Reform and the Irish Lobby for Immigration Reform. I also want to acknowledge the role played by Ambassador Collins and more recently by Ambassador Anderson and staff at the Embassy in Washington who have been steadily building support for our objectives.

Middle East Peace Process

90. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the degree to which the Middle East peace talks continue to be actively supported by the EU and other interests; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41390/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): The commencement of direct talks between Israeli and Palestinian negotiators at the end of July, based on the extensive work and commitment of US Secretary of State Kerry, is an important achievement. Secretary Kerry briefed myself and EU colleagues on progress to date during the informal meeting of EU Foreign Ministers in Vilnius on 7 September. The process is at an early stage, and we are all aware of the very many difficulties to be overcome if agreement is to be reached. I am encouraged by Secretary Kerry's firm commitment and belief that a speedy conclusion remains possible if the parties are willing and negotiate in good faith. The EU is fully committed to giving all possible support to this process. This may well represent the last real opportunity for realisation of a negotiated two-State solution and it is essential that all other parties concerned, including the Quartet and the Arab states, also make every effort to assist.

Question No. 91 answered with Question No. 81.

Overseas Development Aid Issues

92. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which overseas aid continues to be monitored with a view to ensuring that such aid reaches those for whom it was intended; if any specific measures are needed to enhance such accountability; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41392/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Joe Costello): As Minister of State with responsibility for Ireland's Official Development Assistance, I am very conscious of the need to have a high level of assurance that our development assistance reaches its intended beneficiaries and that it makes a real difference in the lives of the poorest people. To ensure that our assistance is effectively delivered to those most in need in developing countries, we work in partnership with national and local governments, local communities, NGOs, and key multilateral partners such as the United Nations and the European Union. All programmes considered for funding assistance are rigorously appraised by Irish Aid staff using clear criteria, including efficiency in the use of resources, cost effectiveness and sustainability of intended impact.

Programmes in receipt of funding through our development programme are subject to regular internal and external monitoring to ensure that the intended objectives and goals are being achieved. They are evaluated and audited by independent experts as well as by my Department's Evaluation and Audit Unit. The Unit's work is regularly reviewed by the independent Audit Committee of my Department. In Partner Countries benefiting from our support, we provide assistance to national Government oversight institutions, such as the Auditor General's Office and the Public Accounts Committees of National Parliaments, to ensure Governments are held to account for the effective expenditure of public funds.

We have zero tolerance for any misuse or misappropriation of aid funding. In the event of any fraud such as happened last year in Uganda, it is our policy to demand a full refund of monies disbursed and to pursue the perpetrators through the police and court system. As the Deputy will be aware, the Government of Uganda has refunded in full the €4 million in aid funds which were misused in 2012.

The Deputy will also be aware that our new Policy for International Development, One World, One Future, which was launched in May this year, reaffirms our commitment to accountability to the Irish people and to our partners in what we do, how we work, and what we are achieving. I believe that the strong focus on appraisal, regular monitoring, independent evaluations and audit provides assurance that aid funds are very closely monitored and used for the purposes intended.

Trade Data

93. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the degree to which the potential for growth in trade has been noted between this jurisdiction and African, American and Asian countries with particular reference to the need to maximise all options with a view to continued improvement in economic performance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41393/13]

94. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which the level of trade has developed over the past five years with countries within the EU, the Americas, Africa, Asia and Australia, and the degree to which potential for development for such markets continues to exist; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41394/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I propose to take Questions Nos. 93 and 94 together.

As the Deputy is aware, the Government Trade Tourism and Investment Strategy (hereafter referred to as “the Strategy”) identifies 27 priority markets, including those with the best prospects for increased trade. Local market teams headed by our Ambassadors are in place in these markets and their work is overseen by the high level Export Trade Council, which I chair. I can ensure the Deputy that my Department and the Embassy network will continue to prioritise our work to support the growth of Irish exports.

While the majority of Irish services and merchandise exports go to Europe and the US and we must continue to cultivate these markets, the Government is strongly focused on the further development of trade ties with Latin America, Africa and the Asia-Pacific region. Nine of the 27 priority markets identified under the Strategy are in Latin America, Africa and the Asia-Pacific region (Brazil, South Africa, China, India, Australia, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, and the Republic of Korea). For the first six months of 2013, goods exports to each of these countries were as follows; Brazil, €136.5 million; South Africa, €126 million; China, €730 million; India, €125 million; Australia, €350 million; Japan, €859 million; Malaysia, €108 million; Singapore, €278 million and the Republic of Korea, €166 million.

Under the oversight of the Export Trade Council, which I chair, we will continue to work to boost bilateral trade with these countries, as well as other key markets in Latin America, the Asia-Pacific region and Africa. In relation to Africa, my Department’s targeted Strategy is aimed at exploring new sectors and markets in that continent that have particular potential for Irish companies and we are working closely with the state agencies and Irish companies on its ongoing implementation. As part of our continued work in this area, my colleague, the Minister of State for Trade and Development, Mr. Joe Costello TD., will lead a trade mission to South

Africa & Nigeria from 10 - 15 November. This will be the third trade mission to South Africa in as many years.

My Department also co-ordinates Joint Economic Commissions (JECs) with a number of important markets including South Korea, Russia, China and Saudi Arabia. The focus of JEC discussions with these countries is on key priority sectors for the Irish export sector and for inward investment into Ireland. My Department, in cooperation with the Embassy network and a number of other Departments and state agencies, hosted JECs with Korea and China during 2012 and the Department is in the process of organising JECs with Russia for the fourth quarter of 2013 and Saudi Arabia for the first quarter of 2014.

Ireland's exports have performed well over the past five years. The total value of merchandise exports in 2012 was €92 billion, representing an increase of 6.48% on the 2008 figure (€86.4 billion), while services exports for 2012 reached €90.29 billion; an increase of 33% on 2008 (€67.9 billion). A table, using CSO data, showing the value of Ireland's goods imports and exports by region over the last 5 years is reproduced below:

Goods Imports by Area (EUR Million)

Period	Great Britain	Northern Ireland	Other EU 1	EFTA 2	Other Europe 3	NAFTA 4	Other APEC5	Rest of World	Unclassified 6	Total
2008	17,941	1,261	17,353	1,841	450	7,316	8,559	1,458	1,404	57,585
2009	12,787	941	12,997	1,328	285	8,403	5,621	1,584	1,115	45,061
2010	13,823	990	13,049	2,148	290	6,900	5,471	1,770	1,321	45,763
2011	15,638	1,047	13,671	1,937	333	6,412	5,410	2,000	1,868	48,315
2012	15,419	1,023	12,777	1,905	376	6,914	5,525	3,479	1,604	49,024

Goods Exports by Area (EUR Million)

Period	Great Britain	Northern Ireland	Other EU 1	EFTA 2	Other Europe 3	NAFTA 4	Other APEC5	Rest of World	Unclassified 6	Total
2008	14,300	1,565	37,976	3,085	554	17,610	8,180	2,914	210	86,394
2009	12,305	1,292	38,616	2,937	540	19,562	7,574	2,857	121	85,803
2010	12,617	1,326	38,169	4,003	577	22,169	7,397	3,312	133	89,703
2011	12,845	1,422	38,293	4,109	641	22,776	7,189	3,890	63	91,228
2012	13,794	1,445	39,024	5,393	640	19,621	7,350	4,625	117	92,009

1 France, Belgium, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Germany, Italy, Denmark, Greece, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Finland, Austria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Romania.

2 Iceland, Switzerland, Liechtenstein and Norway.

3 Includes Ceuta, Melilla, Faroe Islands, Gibraltar, San Marino, Belarus, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro, Turkey, Andorra, Vatican City, Albania, Moldova, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Ukraine, Kosovo.

4 USA, Canada, Mexico.

5 APEC excluding NAFTA countries: Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei, Singapore, Philippines, China, South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Australia, New Zealand, Chile,

Papua New Guinea, Russia, Vietnam, Peru.

6 Trade not classified by country, including Intrastat survey estimates for which a breakdown is not available.

Consultancy Contracts Expenditure

95. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the consultants, if any, he has contracted since 1 January 2013 to advise on the possible sale of any assets; the current situation; the advice given and the terms and cost of the contract; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41545/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I wish to confirm that no such consultants have been contracted by my Department in 2013.

Budget Submissions

96. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Finance further to the SIMI proposal for a swappage scheme, if he will do his best to help our motor industry and the employment that it creates by putting in place a swappage scheme, which would be a major boost if implemented; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41492/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): My Department has received a pre-Budget submission from SIMI which includes, among other things a proposal for a swappage scheme. All such proposals will be considered in the context of the forthcoming Budget.

Financial Services Regulation

97. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to liaise with the Australian authorities in order to facilitate the acquisition of mortgages from financial institutions here by Irish citizens who are currently residing in Australia, and who are prevented from doing so under the Australian Corporation Act that was introduced in 2004; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41242/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I have no responsibility for the issue referred to by the Deputy which is a matter of Australian law. The regulation of mortgage lending in Australia is a matter for the authorities there.

IBRC Mortgage Loan Book

98. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of residential PDH and buy-to-let mortgages currently on the books of Irish Bank Resolution Corporation now in special liquidation; the plans the special liquidator has for the disposal of this loan portfolio; the implications such a sale will have for the individual mortgage customers, including for the protections they currently have under the code of conduct on mortgage arrears and the mortgage arrears targets programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41254/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised that the Special Liquidators of IBRC are maintaining contact with its mortgage holders and with the Central Bank (as part of its overall Mortgage Arrears Resolution Strategy (MARS) process) with a view to ap-

appropriately dealing with INBS mortgage holders in arrears on their mortgage. The Special Liquidators also confirm that the residential mortgage customers of IBRC (in Special Liquidation) continue to enjoy the protection of the Central Bank Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears and other protections in Irish consumer law. As of the end of May 2013 details of the IBRC Mortgage book are as follows:

-	PDH	-	BTL	-
Number of borrowers	11,057	83%	2,189	17%
Number of loans	14,756	85%	2,655	15%

The Central Bank's Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears, which applies to all mortgage lending activities of all regulated entities, except Credit Unions, operating in the State, remains a key protection for those cooperating INBS/IBRC mortgage holders who are in difficulty in meeting their mortgage commitments. The Code provides, inter alia, that mortgage lenders should allow for a flexible approach in the handling of arrears and pre-arrears cases and that they should aim, as far as possible, at assisting the borrower who is in genuine difficulty having regard to the specific circumstances in individual cases. In particular, the Code provides that a lender's Arrears Support Unit (ASU) must base its assessment of the borrower's case on the full circumstances of the borrower including:

- the personal circumstances of the borrower;
- the overall indebtedness of the borrower;
- the information provided in the standard financial statement (SFS);
- the borrower's current repayment capacity, and
- the borrower's previous history.

In relation to the sale of the IBRC mortgage book, the Special Liquidators are taking professional advice on the appropriate method of disposing of loan assets and on the appropriate criteria for determining who should qualify to bid for loan assets. As part of this process the Special Liquidators have also written to all IBRC borrowers to update them on the sale of their IBRC Loans and Collateral Obligations and providing them with an opportunity to make written representations on the method of disposal of their loans and the criteria for determining who may bid for loan assets. The Special Liquidators are under instruction to ensure that the valuation of all IBRC assets is completed by 30 November 2013 and that the sale of all IBRC assets is agreed or completed by no later than 31 December 2013 or as soon as practicable thereafter.

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 or the ultimate sale of the obligations to a third party. The continued applicability of the Central Bank Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears and Mortgage Arrears Targets Programme will depend on the regulatory status of the ultimate acquirer of the portfolio which we will not know until the sales process has concluded. In the event that NAMA ultimately acquires this portfolio, the NAMA Board will determine its strategy at that stage and will, in doing so, be mindful of its legal obligations.

Tax Code

99. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Finance if he has or will put in place a

tax break for families who have outgrown their current home or have had to move in order to work (details supplied); if there is legislation pending to provide assistance to those in negative equity who have no other means to exit their unsuitable domiciliary situation.; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41310/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Finance Act 2009 introduced a cap of 75% on the amount of interest on loans used to purchase, improve or repair rented residential property, that can be deducted in computing rental profit for tax purposes. The restriction applies to interest accruing on or after 7 April 2009. It does not apply to loans in respect of rented commercial property. I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that rental profit for tax purposes is the gross rental income less allowable expenses incurred in earning that rent. In computing the amount of rental profit, only those deductions that are specified in section 97(2) of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 are allowable as deductions against the gross rental income. The main deductible expenses are:

- any rent payable by the landlord in the case of a sub-lease;
- the cost to the landlord of any goods provided or services rendered to a tenant;
- the cost of maintenance, repairs, insurance and management of the property;
- the interest paid on borrowed money used to purchase, improve or repair the property (which, in the case of residential property, is restricted to 75% of the interest and is subject to compliance with PRTB registration requirements for all tenancies that existed in relation to the property in the relevant year); and
- payment of local authority rates.

In addition, wear and tear capital allowances are available in respect of the capital expenditure incurred on fixtures and fittings provided by a landlord for the purposes of furnishing rented residential accommodation. These allowances are granted at the rate of 12.5% per annum of the actual cost of the fixtures and fittings over a period of 8 years.

As regards any changes, the Deputy will be aware that it is a longstanding practice of the Minister for Finance not to comment, in advance of the Budget, on any tax matters that might be the subject of Budget decisions.

The Central Bank has advised me that, while the levels of interest and take up have been low, a number of institutions have trade up/trade down products to assist their customers in such circumstances. The two most important criteria for assessing the suitability of a negative equity mortgage product in a particular case is its affordability and sustainability. The Central Bank advises that, when assessing a negative equity mortgage proposal, lenders should be cognisant of their obligations under the Consumer Protection Code regarding these matters as well as, if appropriate, the Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears. There are no proposals at this time for further legislative development in this area.

Disabled Drivers and Passengers Scheme

100. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Finance if he will consider the inclusion of the blind pension in the primary certificate criteria and assessment for disabled drivers' tax concessions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41328/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers (Tax Concessions) Scheme provides relief from VAT and Vehicle Registration Tax (up to a certain limit), and exemption from motor tax, on the purchase of an adapted car for

transport of a person with specific severe and permanent physical disabilities. The disability criteria for these concessions are set out in the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers (Tax Concessions) Regulations 1994. To get a Primary Medical Certificate, an applicant must be permanently and severely disabled within the terms of these Regulations. I have no plans to change the criteria at this stage.

Budget 2014

101. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide in tabular form the carry over to Budget 2014 in respect of the local property tax, changes to the maximum allowable pension fund for tax relief purposes, carbon tax, capital gains tax, capital acquisitions tax, PRSI and other measures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41340/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Taxation provisions included in the Finance Act 2013 and the Finance (Local Property Tax) Act 2012 in relation to measures set out in Budget 2013 will result in an estimated carryover of around €300 million in 2014. There was also carryover from changes to PRSI in Budget 2013. Measures in relation to the maximum allowable pension fund at retirement to be introduced in 2014 were also announced in Budget 2013. A cross-Departmental Working Group of officials has been established to examine, among other things, the changes required to the existing arrangements governing the maximum allowable pension fund at retirement (the Standard Fund Threshold) and other potential alternative approaches for achieving the commitment. The Working Group has also sought views from various interested parties as part of the examination of options for delivering on the Budget commitment. This Working Group is also developing estimates of the likely yield from the changes. The result of this work will be incorporated into the budgetary arithmetic and will be included as part of the Budget 2014 measures. Until then the table sets out the remainder of the estimated carryover from Budget 2013.

Budget 2013 carryover	€m
Local property tax	250
Carbon tax	16
Capital gains tax	-1
Capital acquisitions tax	12
Income tax	35
USC	13
Employment and investment incentive	-25
Film relief (from 2016)	20
Auto-diesel excise relief for road hauliers	-35
3 year relief for start-up companies	-10
Real estate investment trusts (REITS)	-12
Increase in the VAT accounting threshold	20
Reduction in farmers flat rate addition	3
DIRT and life assurance exit taxes	14
PRSI	53
Total	353

Universal Social Charge Yield

102. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the yield from increasing from 5% to 10% the universal social charge surcharge on income covered by property related

reliefs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41341/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As the Deputy will be aware, Finance Act 2012 introduced a surcharge of 5% on the amount of income sheltered by property reliefs in a given year. The surcharge was effective from 1 January 2012 and applied to individuals with gross incomes exceeding EUR 100,000. It is tentatively estimated that the yield from increasing the surcharge from 5% to 10% could be of the order of EUR 7 million in a full year. As a result of decreasing claims of legacy property incentives over recent years the yield from the surcharge is estimated to be lower now than at the time the surcharge was announced in the 2012 Budget.

Excise Duties Yield

103. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the yield from increasing the excise duty on a packet of 20 cigarettes by 20 cent, 50 cent and €1 respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41342/13]

104. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the yield from increasing the excise duty on a bottle of wine by 20 cent, 50 cent and €1 respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41343/13]

105. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the yield from increasing the excise duty on beer and cider by 2 cent, 5 cent and 10 cent a pint respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41344/13]

106. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the yield from increasing the excise duty on spirits by 2 cent, 5 cent and 10 cent per half glass measure, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41345/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 103 to 106, inclusive, together.

I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that, based on data currently available, the estimated full year yield from an increase in excise (VAT inclusive) on the products referred to are as follows:

-	20c	50c	€1
-	Full year	Full year	Full year
Wine	11.3	27.1	50.5
Tobacco	30.7	75.8	148.8
-	2c	5c	10c
-	Full year	Full year	Full year
Beer	13.8	34.4	68.5
Cider	1.9	4.7	9.4
Spirits	7.6	18.8	36.9

Tax Collection Forecasts

107. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the additional income tax payable by a single person earning €60,000 who makes a pension contribution of 10% of gross salary if pension tax relief was restricted to 30%; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41346/13]

108. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the additional income tax payable by a single person earning €70,000 who makes a pension contribution of 10% of gross salary if pension tax relief was restricted to 30%; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41347/13]

109. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the additional income tax payable by a single person earning €80,000 who makes a pension contribution of 10% of gross salary if pension tax relief was restricted to 30%; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41348/13]

110. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the additional income tax payable by a single person earning €100,000 who makes a pension contribution of 10% of gross salary if pension tax relief was restricted to 30%; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41349/13]

111. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the additional income tax payable by a single person earning €80,000 who makes a pension contribution of 10% of gross salary if pension tax relief was restricted to 30% and the earnings cap for pensions contributions was reduced to €70,000; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41350/13]

112. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the additional income tax payable by a single person earning €100,000 who makes a pension contribution of 10% of gross salary if pension tax relief was restricted to 30% and the earnings cap for pensions contributions was reduced to €70,000; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41351/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 107 to 112, inclusive, together.

At the outset, it is important to note that the maximum annual amount of tax-relieved pension contributions that an individual can contribute to their pension arrangements is restricted to an age-related percentage limit of remuneration and is further subject to an overall earnings cap, which currently stands at €115,000. In essence, an individual can make tax relieviable pension contributions up to the lower of the relevant age-related percentage of their actual remuneration and the relevant age related percentage of €115,000. The age related percentage limits are set out in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Age	%
Up to age 30	15% of remuneration
30 to 39	20%
40 to 49	25%
50 to 54	30%
55 to 59	35%
60 and over	40%

In the first four questions, both the level of earnings stipulated, ranging from €60,000 to €100,000, and the level of contribution at 10% of gross earnings in all cases, are lower than both the age-related percentage limit (at all ages) and the earnings limit referred to above. The additional income tax that would be payable by single persons in those circumstances if tax relief was reduced from 41% to 30% is set out in the following table.

Table 2

Gross Earnings	Pension Contribution at 10%	Income Tax Relief @ 41%	Income Tax Relief @ 30%	Additional Income tax Payable
€60,000	€6,000	€2,460	€1,800	€660
€70,000	€7,000	€2,870	€2,100	€770
€80,000	€8,000	€3,280	€2,400	€880
€100,000	€10,000	€4,100	€3,000	€1,100

In the last two questions, the scenarios outlined are ones where, in addition to a reduction in the rate of tax relief on pension contributions from 41% to 30%, the earnings limit is reduced from €115,000 to €70,000. As indicated earlier, individuals can make tax-relievable pension contributions up to the lower of the relevant age-related percentage of their actual remuneration and the relevant age-related percentage of the earnings limit. In both of these scenarios, for the individuals concerned, notwithstanding that the earnings limit at €70,000 is below their gross annual earnings, the rate of contribution at 10% of their gross earnings leaves them unaffected by the change. In other words, as the following table illustrates, a pension contribution of 10% of €80,000, i.e. €8,000, is less than the maximum contribution allowed by the age-related percentage of the proposed lower earnings limit of €70,000, at all ages. The same holds for a contribution of 10% of gross earnings of €100,000. In the particular scenarios outlined in the questions, therefore, no additional income tax would be payable as a result of the reduction in the earnings limit over and above that outlined in Table 2.

Table 3

Age	Percentage contribution Limit	Earnings Limit	Maximum Tax-relievable Contribution
Up to age 30	15% of remuneration	€70,000	€10,500
30 to 39	20%	€70,000	€14,000
40 to 49	25%	€70,000	€17,500
50 to 54	30%	€70,000	€21,000
55 to 59	35%	€70,000	€24,500
60 and over	40%	€70,000	€28,000

Tax Collection Forecasts

113. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the yield that would be achieved from abolishing personal tax credits for persons with income over €100,000; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41352/13]

114. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the yield that would be achieved from abolishing personal tax credits for persons with income over €125,000; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41353/13]

115. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the yield that would be achieved from abolishing personal tax credits for persons with income over €150,000; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41354/13]

116. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the yield that would be

achieved from abolishing personal tax credits for persons with income over €175,000; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41355/13]

117. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the yield that would be achieved from abolishing personal tax credits for persons with income over €200,000; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41356/13]

118. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the yield that would be achieved from abolishing personal and employee tax credits for persons with income over €100,000; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41357/13]

119. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the yield that would be achieved from abolishing personal and employee tax credits for persons with income over €125,000; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41358/13]

120. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the yield that would be achieved from abolishing personal and employee tax credits for persons with income over €150,000; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41359/13]

121. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the yield that would be achieved from abolishing personal and employee tax credits for persons with income over €175,000; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41360/13]

122. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the yield that would be achieved from abolishing personal and employee tax credits for persons with income over €200,000; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41361/13]

123. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the yield that would be achieved from abolishing personal and employee tax credits for persons with income over €200,000; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41362/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 113 to 123, inclusive, together.

I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that the estimated full year yield to the Exchequer, estimated by reference to 2013 incomes, of abolishing the main personal tax credits for income earners earning over €100,000 would be of the order of €320 million.

The estimated full year yield to the Exchequer, estimated by reference to 2013 incomes, of abolishing the main personal tax credits for income earners earning over €125,000 would be of the order of €180 million.

The estimated full year yield to the Exchequer, estimated by reference to 2013 incomes, of abolishing the main personal tax credits for income earners earning over €150,000 would be of the order of €115 million.

The estimated full year yield to the Exchequer, estimated by reference to 2013 incomes, of abolishing the main personal tax credits for income earners earning over €175,000 would be of the order of €80 million.

The estimated full year yield to the Exchequer, estimated by reference to 2013 incomes, of abolishing the main personal tax credits for income earners earning over €200,000 would be of the order of €60 million.

The estimated full year yield to the Exchequer, estimated by reference to 2013 incomes, of abolishing the main personal and employee tax credits for income earners earning over €100,000 would be of the order of €500 million.

The estimated full year yield to the Exchequer, estimated by reference to 2013 incomes, of abolishing the main personal and employee tax credits for income earners earning over €125,000 would be of the order of €270 million.

The estimated full year yield to the Exchequer, estimated by reference to 2013 incomes, of abolishing the main personal and employee tax credits for income earners earning over €150,000 would be of the order of €165 million.

The estimated full year yield to the Exchequer, estimated by reference to 2013 incomes, of abolishing the main personal and employee tax credits for income earners earning over €175,000 would be of the order of €115 million.

The estimated full year yield to the Exchequer, estimated by reference to 2013 incomes, of abolishing the main personal and employee tax credits for income earners earning over €200,000 would be of the order of €80 million.

It should be noted that the income ranges referred to above relate to Gross Income as defined in Revenue Statistical Report 2011.

These figures are estimates from the Revenue tax-forecasting model using actual data for the year 2010 adjusted as necessary for income and employment trends in the interim. They are therefore provisional and likely to be revised. It should also be noted that a married couple who has elected or has been deemed to have elected for joint assessment is counted as one tax unit. Depending on the incomes of the couples concerned, they may be in a position to elect for separate assessment, which could result in their tax liability remaining unchanged by the proposals above.

Tax Collection Forecasts

124. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the yield that would be achieved from abolishing rent relief from 1 January 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41363/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Section 473 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 provides tax relief at the standard rate to individuals who pay for private rented accommodation that is used as their sole or main residence. The level of rent qualifying for rent relief depends on an individual's marital status and age. In Budget 2011, it was announced that rent relief was being withdrawn on a phased basis. No new claimants were allowed from 7 December 2010 but existing claimants will continue to receive the relief, on a reducing basis, with a complete cessation of the relief from 2018. This is in line with the schedule proposed for the withdrawal of mortgage interest relief. The scheduled withdrawal of rent relief is set out in the following table:

Tax Year	Reduction %
2011	20%
2012	20%
2013	10%
2014	10%
2015	10%

Tax Year	Reduction %
2016	10%
2017	10%
2018	10% to 0%

It is assumed that the deputy has in mind the abolition of the remaining 50% of the relief with immediate effect from 1 January 2014. On that basis a residual saving to the Exchequer of €42 million would arise in respect of 2014, based on the 2011 costs of the scheme, the latest year for which historical data are available. That amount would represent an estimated increase of €34m over the saving expected for 2014 under the original plan for phased reduction.

Tax Collection Forecasts

125. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the yield that would be achieved from applying a 20% levy to the profits in Ireland of tobacco companies in order to fund smoking related health measures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41364/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I assume the Deputy is referring to the proposal to introduce a price cap on the pre-tax price of tobacco as proposed by the Irish Cancer Society and the Irish Heart Foundation in their pre-Budget submission. Preliminary advice on this suggests that any proposal to interfere with the ability of manufacturers to set the maximum price level for tobacco is a breach of Council Directive 2011/64/EU on the structure and rates of excise duty applied to manufactured tobacco.

VAT Rate Reductions

126. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Finance in view of the decision to reduce the VAT rate from 13% to 9% and the significance of this reduction to the tourism sector in County Kerry and throughout the country and the very positive implications it has had on the industry in creating and maintaining jobs and giving value for money, if he will support the calls to keep the VAT rate at 9% and ensure that Ireland has a strong and competitive tourism industry going forward; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41372/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The 9% reduced VAT rate for tourism related services was introduced in July 2011 as part of the Government Jobs Initiative. The measure was designed to boost tourism and create additional jobs in that sector. In line with best international practice it was introduced as a temporary measure and is due to expire at end December 2013, at which point it will revert to 13.5%. Retaining the 9% rate would be very costly to the Exchequer and would require an increase in taxation or reduction in expenditure elsewhere. Any proposal to maintain the 9% VAT rate will be considered in the context of the Budget.

Tax Collection Forecasts

127. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the yield from increasing betting duty to 1.25% and 1.5%, respectively, while also extending it to online bets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41373/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Based on a yield in 2012 of €27 million under the current betting duty regime, an increase in betting duty as set out by the Deputy would yield €33 million and €40 million respectively. With regard to the extension of betting duty to online bets, it was announced in Budget 2011 that the necessary arrangements are being made to ensure that bets placed on the internet by domestic punters are subject to the same level of betting duty as applies to high street betting shops. This will serve to broaden the tax base and increase betting duty receipts.

The Finance Act 2011 provides for the taxation of bets that remote bookmakers enter into with persons in the State. This means, for example, that a business which engages in online bookmaking and which accepts bets from people in this country will be liable for betting duty on those bets, irrespective of where that business is based. The existing betting duty (1%) will be applied to such bets. The Finance Act also provides for the taxation of Betting Exchanges under the new arrangements; however the calculation of the tax will take account of their particular business model, in other words a 15% tax on the commission charged. In addition, excise duties are being applied to the granting and renewal of remote bookmakers' and remote betting intermediaries' licences.

The Betting (Amendment) Bill, which was published in July, will establish the regulatory framework for these licences. The tax changes provided for in the Finance Act can only be implemented once the Betting (Amendment) Bill is enacted. It is estimated that the full year yield from the taxation of remote betting would be around €20 million at the current rate of 1%. An increase as set out by the Deputy would increase this to €25 million and €30 million respectively.

Social Insurance Rates

128. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide favourable consideration to reducing employer PRSI as it will greatly assist in maintaining existing jobs and in creating thousands of new jobs throughout the country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41377/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): It is a longstanding practice of the Minister for Finance not to comment, in advance of the Budget, on any tax matters that might be the subject of Budget decisions.

Budget 2014

129. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Finance the current working estimate of the quantum of new net budgetary measures that would be required in budget 2014 to meet the troika target of 5.1% of GDP for 2014, and to provide the workings of that calculation, for example, GDP of €174 billion, then 5.1% implies general Government deficit of no more than €8.9 billion, 2013 estimated GGD is €12.5 billion, so minimum correction of €3.6bn required; before any new budgetary measures, a reduction in general Government deficit of €2.8 billion is estimated €1.9 billion economic effects, €0.6 billion carryover from budget 2013, €0.4 billion due to Haddington Road, implying a minimum additional correction requirement of €0.8 billion from new budgetary changes in budget 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41491/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The budgetary and economic forecasts which will underpin the Budget are still a work in progress. I will not speculate on those figures at this stage. Budgetary forecasts will incorporate the impacts of the recently published Q2 Quarterly National Accounts and the September Exchequer returns. I would say to the Deputy that his nominal GDP forecast of €174.0bn and headline general government deficit of c. €8.9bn

correspond with a deficit of 5.1% of GDP. These figures are consistent with those contained in April's Stability Programme Update. However, I would stress that there has been quite a degree of data flow over recent months and these figures are quite dated.

In terms of carryover into 2014, I would refer the Deputy to a parliamentary question I answered on this during the summer, 36346/13, which stated that taxation provisions included in the Finance Act 2013 and the Finance (Local Property Tax) Act 2012 in relation to measures set out in Budget 2013 will result in an estimated carryover of around €300 million in 2014. There was also carryover from changes to PRSI in Budget 2013. Measures in relation to the maximum allowable pension fund at retirement to be introduced in 2014 were also announced in Budget 2013. A cross-Departmental Working Group of officials has been established to examine, among other things, the changes required to the existing arrangements governing the maximum allowable pension fund at retirement (the Standard Fund Threshold) and other potential alternative approaches for achieving the commitment. The Working Group has also sought views from various interested parties as part of the examination of options for delivering on the Budget commitment. This Working Group is also developing estimates of the likely yield from the changes. With regard to the impact of Haddington Road, this is a matter for the Minister for Public Expenditure & Reform.

As with previous Budgets, I will endeavour to strike a balance between bringing sustainability to the public finances while protecting to the greatest extent possible, both the economic recovery and the most vulnerable in society.

Consultancy Contracts Expenditure

130. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Finance the consultants, if any, he has contracted since 1 January 2013 to advise on the possible sale of any assets; the current situation; the advice given and the terms and cost of the contract; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41544/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Where requested by Government, NewERA (a business unit in the National Treasury Management Agency (NTMA)) is carrying out advisory and oversight roles in relation to the possible restructuring or disposal of commercial State company assets. NewERA's role in these disposal processes is to assist and advise the relevant Government Departments in representing the Government's financial interests in the context of asset disposals and to ensure that Government-agreed timelines and financial objectives are clearly communicated to the relevant parties. It is also the responsibility of NewERA to ensure that the Government Steering Group overseeing the transactions is kept fully informed of progress and developments with the goal of ensuring that the financial objectives of the process are achieved. In order to assist NewERA in its role, the NTMA (acting through its NewERA unit) have engaged three external consultants to provide advice in respect of various technical aspects of the proposed disposals of State assets, as set out in the following table:

Consultant	Possible Asset Sale	Nature of Advice	Details of Contract
Barclays Bank	Bord Gáis Energy	Financial advice - ongoing	Contract is between the NTMA and Barclays and was signed in October 2012. No payments have been made under this contract to date.

Consultant	Possible Asset Sale	Nature of Advice	Details of Contract
A & L Goodbody	Bord Gáis Energy	Legal advice - ongoing	Contract is between the NTMA and A&L Goodbody and was signed in January 2013. No payments have been made under this contract to date.
Lane Clark and Peacock (LCP)	Lottery Licence	Pensions advice - complete	Contract is between NTMA and LCP and was signed in August 2013. The cost of this advice was €3,750 plus VAT.

European Council Meetings

131. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Finance if he will be raising the issue of Ireland's debt burden at the October meeting of the European Council; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40921/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Taoiseach will represent Ireland at the European Council on 24/25 October 2013. The Council agenda includes the following subjects: digital economy, innovation and services; growth, competitiveness and jobs; and the economic and monetary union. These issues are of great importance to Ireland's and Europe's future growth prospects. While I will not be attending the Council, I can assure the Deputy that every suitable opportunity is taken to present Ireland's case by all Ministers at the many international fora they attend while representing this country.

In this context I would point to a number of positive developments during the lifetime of this Government to date that will serve to alleviate our debt burden including the reduction of the interest rates on our EU programme borrowings, the extension of the maturities of our EFSF and EFSM loans and the replacement of the Promissory Notes issued to the Irish Bank Resolution Corporation (IBRC) with a series of longer term, non-amortising floating rate Government bonds. In addition, as you are aware the Euro-Area Heads of State or Government agreed on 29th June 2012 to break the vicious circle between banks and sovereigns, and that when a Single Supervisory Mechanism is in place involving the ECB, the European Stability Mechanism (ESM) could recapitalize banks directly. The Euro-Area Heads of State or Government confirmed this position and mandated EU Finance Ministers to prepare an operational framework by mid-2013.

A considerable amount of work has been undertaken at technical, senior official and Ministerial level on the ESM's Direct Bank Recapitalisation Instrument (DBR). This work culminated in agreement on the main features of the operational framework for the ESM's DBR Instrument at the June 20th Eurogroup meeting of Euro-Area Finance Ministers in Luxembourg.

We have succeeded in having specific provision for retrospective recapitalisation included in the framework, which states that "The potential retroactive application of the instrument should be decided on a case-by-case basis and by mutual agreement." There is still a lot of negotiation to be done on this but the agreement now in place keeps the possibility to apply to the ESM for a retrospective direct recapitalisation of the Irish banks open for us, should we

wish to avail of it.

EU-IMF Programme of Support Issues

132. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Finance if he intends to contact Chancellor Merkel following her recent comments regarding Ireland's economic performance. [40917/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I interact on a continuous basis with all of my EU counterparts, in particular at the monthly Ecofin meetings, including with the German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schauble. The most recent comments by Chancellor Merkel acknowledge the successful reforms taken by Ireland under the EU/IMF economic adjustment programme. These reforms have been taken to benefit the Irish economy and have put Ireland on a more sustainable path to growth. These necessary reforms have increased investor confidence and improved funding conditions for both the Irish sovereign and the banks.

The important agreements that Ireland has reached with European partners over the programme period shows how positively Ireland is viewed. These agreements include the lowering of the interest rate on our EU programme funding, an extension of maturities on lending from our European partners and the restructuring of the promissory note. These all help to underpin our longer term debt sustainability, lower financing costs to the State and support economic growth.

As Ireland's EU-IMF Programme of Financial Support comes to an end this year the Government's focus is now firmly fixed on achieving a successful and durable exit from our programme, and a full and sustainable return to the financial markets, and we are doing all we can to this end.

European Financial Stability Facility

133. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Finance if he has raised the issue of the retrospective recapitalisation of Irish banks in any of the discussions he has had with German Chancellor Angela Merkel since the German election. [40735/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I have not had any discussions with Chancellor Merkel since her recent re-election. However, as the Deputy will be aware, the Euro-Area Heads of State or Government agreed on 29th June 2012 to break the vicious circle between banks and sovereigns, and that when a Single Supervisory Mechanism is in place involving the ECB, the ESM could recapitalize banks directly. The Euro-Area Heads of State or Government confirmed this position and mandated EU Finance Ministers to prepare an operational framework by mid-2013.

The Eurogroup meeting of Euro-Area Finance Ministers on 20th June 2013 agreed on the main features of the European Stability Mechanism's Direct Bank Recapitalisation instrument (DBR). The instrument will come into effect when the Single Supervisory Mechanism is in place and operational. Given this requirement, the earliest this can happen will be mid-to-late 2014.

We have succeeded in having specific provision for retrospective recapitalisation included in the main features which states that "The potential retroactive application of the instrument should be decided on a case-by-case basis and by mutual agreement." There is still a lot of negotiation to be done on this aspect of the facility but the agreement now in place keeps the possibility to apply to the ESM for a retrospective direct recapitalisation of the Irish banks open

for us, should we wish to avail of it. This overall framework builds upon the agreement secured on 29th June 2012, and is an important step in the Eurozone's efforts in this regard.

International Tax Issues

134. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the concerns the European Commission has regarding the double Irish taxation system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39136/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Commission has not sought information on the so-called 'Double Irish' structure as part of its current review of corporate tax ruling procedures in various EU Member States. The Commission review is looking at practice in relation to the provision of advance tax rulings or opinions. The 'Double Irish' two-tier structure is an international tax-planning arrangement which has been designed and developed by tax and legal advisers. It relies on arbitrage between the different tax rules used in different countries to achieve a low level of taxation on foreign profits of companies not resident here and is not part of the Irish tax offering.

Differences arise in the legal and tax systems between countries. International tax planning takes account of these differences in national systems and rules. The only way to effectively deal with such arrangements is for countries to work together to examine these structures and to consider how international rules can be amended to ensure fair levels of taxation. Ireland remains fully committed to this approach to ensure coherence in international taxation. In this regard, Ireland is participating in projects at EU and OECD level which aim to address international tax issues.

Corporation Tax

135. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Finance if he is concerned about Ireland's corporation tax rate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39137/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Taoiseach, myself and other members of the Government have repeatedly expressed the Government's commitment to the retention of the 12.5% rate and I do not foresee any concerns in this regard.

Budget 2014

136. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Finance if he has had meetings with officials from the Department of An Taoiseach on the forthcoming budget; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39048/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Budget 2014 is the culmination of a year long budgetary process. The development of the Budget consists of many important elements, including the publication of the Stability Programme Update and subsequent debate. Regarding the Budget, meetings take place throughout the year between my officials and officials of other organizations, such as the NTMA, the Revenue Commissioners and other Government Departments, most notably the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. Suffice to say, there would be a high quantity of meetings held in relation to the Budget, and officials from the Department of An Taoiseach would be in attendance at some of these.

Fuel Smuggling

137. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Finance the steps that have been taken to tackle illicit fuel smuggling in the Border region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39600/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that they are very conscious of the threat that illicit fuel smuggling poses to the Exchequer and to legitimate business and they have adopted a comprehensive strategy to tackle the problem. This strategy includes the following elements:

- The licensing regime for auto fuel traders was strengthened with effect from September 2011 to limit the ability of the fuel criminals to get laundered fuel onto the market;

- A new licensing regime was introduced for marked fuel traders in October 2012, which is designed to limit the ability of criminals to source marked fuel for laundering;

- Following a significant investment in the required IT systems, new supply chain controls were introduced from January 2013. These controls require all licensed fuel traders, whether dealing in road fuel or marked fuel, to make monthly electronic returns to Revenue of their fuel transactions. Revenue is using this data to identify suspicious or anomalous transactions and patterns of distribution that will support robust follow-up enforcement action where necessary;

- An intensified targeting, in co-operation with other law enforcement agencies on both sides of the border, of enforcement action against suspected fuel laundering operations; and

- Following discussions with HM Revenue & Customs in the UK on regulatory measures to tackle the problem, the two administrations signed a Memorandum of Understanding in May 2012 on a joint approach to finding a more effective marker for use in both jurisdictions. Submissions on potential new markers are currently being evaluated.

Revenue's enforcement strategy in the fuel sector has already yielded significant results. To date in 2013, Revenue has seized 168,050 litres of mineral oil in operations carried out in the border area. They have also uncovered six Oil Laundries, seized 114,000 litres of laundered fuel, four tankers, six lorries and fifteen other vehicles. One person was arrested during the course of these operations, which play a crucial role in cutting off the supply of laundered and illicit fuel.

Revenue will maintain its approach of seizing illicit fuel and closing down retail outlets that do not have the required licence or fail to comply with licence requirements.

School Transport Provision

138. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the amount of money refunded to his Department following the investigations into corruption and-or irregularities in the Limerick office of Bus Éireann's school transport section. [41283/13]

140. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills in relation to the Limerick office, where the refunds following the investigations into corruption and irregularities appear in the school transport accounts and in the accounts of his Department. [41285/13]

141. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will be informing the Garda of the irregularities in the Limerick office of Bus Éireann's school transport section.

[41286/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Ciarán Cannon):
I propose to take Questions Nos. 138, 140 and 141 together.

The matters raised by the Deputy are proper to Bus Éireann. I am informed by Bus Éireann that in 2010, following an investigation instigated by the Company in relation to school transport matters in Limerick, disciplinary action was taken against an employee in line with Bus Éireann internal procedures. This was an internal disciplinary investigation conducted and concluded by Bus Éireann. Bus Éireann confirmed that the incidents that were investigated in 2010 did not require any monies to be repaid to my Department.

School Transport Provision

139. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the amount of money that was charged under the 13% agreement with Bus Éireann in relation to the administration fees paid to it that were refunded. [41284/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Ciarán Cannon):
Bus Éireann, which operates school transport services on behalf of my Department, maintains a separate account for the School Transport Scheme. This account is audited each year by independent auditors and accounts in respect of the last number of years are available on my Department's website. The amount rebated for the financial years 2008 to 2012 is €5m, €351m, €294m, €1.771m and €3.607m respectively.

Questions Nos. 140 and 141 answered with Question No. 138.

Departmental Staff Recruitment

142. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he is satisfied that the recruitment process for the appointment of a position (details supplied) was carried out in an open and transparent manner. [41316/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Ciarán Cannon):
The recruitment process mentioned by the Deputy was conducted by an Education and Training Board. The board responsible for the filling of this position has informed my Department that its recruitment procedures are transparent, valid and appropriate and that these procedures were followed in filling the position in question.

School Transport Applications

143. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a person (details supplied) in County Kildare will receive their school bus ticket; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41333/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Ciarán Cannon):
Bus Éireann, which operates the school transport schemes on behalf of my Department, has advised that the family in question was late in submitting its application for school transport for the 2013-14 school year and that a ticket will issue within the next few days.

Disadvantaged Status

144. **Deputy Derek Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if there are any specific provisions in place within schools to provide books and other materials for disadvantaged

students; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41233/13]

163. **Deputy Derek Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if there are any specific provisions in place within schools to provide books and other materials to disadvantaged students; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41435/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I propose to take Questions Nos. 144 and 163 together.

A key focus of the Government's education policy is to prioritise investment in favour of those most at risk and to optimise access, participation and outcomes at every level of the system for disadvantaged groups. In 2012, my Department provided approximately €15 million in total to first and second level schools by way of book grants and the same level of funding has been allocated for 2013. Schools participating in DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) receive an enhanced grant under the School Book Grant Scheme. The current per capita rates, as allocated to all schools, are as follows: Primary DEIS - €21; Primary non-DEIS - €11; Post-primary DEIS - €39; and Post-primary non-DEIS - €24. Since becoming Minister for Education and Skills, I have attempted to take steps to reduce the cost burden of textbooks on families. In this regard, I have been very clear in my support for book rental schemes. A survey of schools by the Department, published in May 2012, showed that 76% of primary schools operated a book rental scheme. At second level, and of those which did respond, 88% of those in the VEC sector and 73% of those in the Community and Comprehensive sector also operated book rental schemes. Savings of up to 80% of the cost of buying new books can be made where schools operate rental schemes. This is significant for parents.

I launched Guidelines for Developing Textbook Rental Schemes in Schools on 28 January last. The guidelines provide practical advice to primary and post-primary schools on how rental schemes can be established and operated. The aim of the guidelines is to help as many schools as possible to start such book rental programmes and, in particular, to encourage those schools that are not yet operating book rental schemes to introduce them in light of the evidence for the potential of savings for parents. A special Guide for Parents was also published to inform them of how the schemes operate and how parents can help schools to establish and run them. I also published a Report on Textbook Rental Schemes in Schools and the Allocation of Textbook Grants, compiled by the Department of Education and Skills, in May 2012. This report presented four policy options to encourage schools to establish textbook rental schemes. My Department will continue to monitor the number of schools operating book rental schemes and consider further steps to encourage schools to do so if this proves necessary.

In addition, DEIS schools have been given the autonomy to work within the guidelines for the appropriate use of DEIS funding and to decide how best to utilise DEIS resources, including the DEIS grant, to achieve maximum benefits to the most at risk pupils in line with their DEIS Action Plans and addressing educational disadvantage. Embedded in the Home School Community Liaison Scheme (HSCL), which is available to all DEIS schools, is the belief that parents are the first and most important educators of their child. The HSCL Scheme aims to enable parents to become active participants in their children's learning and to stimulate learning in the home. At primary school level, packs are brought to the parents of infants entering DEIS schools for the first time by the HSCL co-ordinators. These may contain an age-appropriate book, colouring materials, or a simple craft activity. The parents are encouraged to engage in the activity or to read and interact with their child, so that the parent-child learning relationship is developed. As part of the primary to post-primary transfer programme, some HSCL co-ordinators bring a literacy pack to the families of all first-year pupils attending DEIS post-primary schools. Its aim is to improve the child's reading level and general literacy skills helping to maintain the parent-child learning relationship.

Third Level Expenditure

145. **Deputy Peter Mathews** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the amount spent by institution, in each year since 2008, on rebranding or brand repositioning for each university and institute of technology here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41243/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The information sought by the Deputy is not readily available in my Department. Officials in my Department have asked the Higher Education Authority to check if the information is obtainable. Any available information will be forwarded to the Deputy as soon as possible.

School Services Staff

146. **Deputy Michael McCarthy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on whether it was reasonable to enforce a 5% cut under the Financial Measures in the Public Interest Act 2009 on persons who are not public servants as has happened in the case of low paid school caretakers and secretaries even though neither are in many cases subject to a salary scale, have no pension rights and no sick leave entitlements; his views on the implications posed by a case currently before the Employment Appeals Tribunal (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41246/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (No 2) Act 2009 was introduced in order to achieve a significant reduction in the public service pay bill. All persons employed by a recognised school or VEC/ETB are “public servants” within the meaning of the Act, regardless of the source of the money used to fund their salary, the lack of ability of any Minister or Department to determine on their appointment or set their pay rates and irrespective of whether they are eligible for, or members of, a public service pension scheme. The fact that such staff come within the definition of “public servant” solely for the purposes of the Act does not alter their employment status in any other respect. When the Tribunal issues a decision in the case referred to by the Deputy, I will consider the implications of that decision.

School Patronage

147. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will invite submissions from all boards of management and parents associations of all schools on the subject of school patronage to ensure receipt of a wide diversity of submissions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41271/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The Deputy may be aware that on the 23rd September last, I launched a public consultation on promoting inclusiveness in primary schools. The public consultation process is part of my Action Plan in response to the Report of the Advisory Group to the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector. The main stakeholder groups that were involved in the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector have been contacted directly and invited to make a submission. This includes the school management bodies and the National Parents Council Primary. An information leaflet, specifically targeted at parents, is being distributed to all parents’ associations, in conjunction with the National Parents’ Council - Primary. Copies of the information leaflet are also being distributed directly to primary schools. The parents leaflet and the call for submissions are available to download from the Department’s website - www.education.ie. All interested

parties are invited to submit their views by 22 November.

Book Rental Scheme

148. **Deputy Derek Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will provide a list of schools in County Galway that have a book rental scheme in place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41279/13]

162. **Deputy Derek Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will provide a list of schools in County Galway that have a book rental scheme in place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41434/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I propose to take Questions Nos. 148 and 162 together.

As the Deputy may be aware I launched new “Guidelines for Developing Textbook Rental Schemes in Schools” on 28th January last. These Guidelines provide practical advice to primary and post-primary schools on how rental schemes can be established and operated. The aim of the Guidelines is to help as many schools as possible to start such book rental programmes. The publication of these Guidelines follows a survey of schools by the Department, and which I published in May 2012. This had a 99% response rate at primary level, and showed that 76% of primary schools operate a book rental scheme. At second level, the response rate was lower, at 44%. Of those which did respond, 88% of those in the VEC sector and 73% of those in the Community & Comprehensive sector operated a book rental scheme. I believe these results show that we have a good foundation to build on across the country. I hope that schools that are not yet operating book rental schemes will be encouraged to use the Guidelines to introduce them. If they do, it will result in substantial savings for parents. Schools which already have rental schemes can save parents up to 80% of the cost of buying new books. The Department does not presently have the information requested by the Deputy. However, the Department will continue to monitor the number of schools operating book rental schemes. The information requested by the Deputy will be gathered as part of the annual enrolment data returns from primary and post-primary schools and will be available once it has been collated.

Student Grant Scheme Rates

149. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will protect the student maintenance grant in budget 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41305/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): There was no change in Budget 2013 to any of the student grant rates including the non-adjacent or adjacent rates of grant or the higher special rate of grant for the 2013 financial year. The aim of the student maintenance grant scheme has always been to make a contribution to the cost of going to college; covering the full cost has never been a feasible option. As the Deputy will be aware, the reality of our economic situation presents significant challenges that have to be reconciled with limitations on public resources. This is a very stark reality, which, unfortunately, means that changes to any public service, including the student grant scheme, cannot be ruled out. I empathise with students and I am very conscious of the fundamental role played by the student grant scheme in supporting families who are putting their children through further and higher education. However, the state of the public finances is such that tough decisions had to be made to control public expenditure and to ensure sustainability in the long run. For this reason it is the respon-

sibility of Government to take into consideration all areas of public services when formulating Budget 2014. Ultimately, our budgetary decisions now will play a major part in creating a sustainable economy and in regaining our economic independence. As the Deputy will be aware all proposals made in relation to education expenditure including changes to student grants will be considered in the context of the Budget 2014.

Student Voluntary Contributions

150. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will not under any circumstances increase the student contribution charge; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41306/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The Student Contribution stands at €2,500 for the current academic year and is payable by students who qualify under the free fees schemes. I have already signalled my intention to increase the Student Contribution by €250 each year hereafter until the 2015/16 academic year when the contribution will stand at €3,000. The Contribution is paid by the Exchequer in respect of students who qualify under my Department's Student Grant Scheme (some 40%). The Higher Education Authority (HEA) is undertaking a study on the sustainability of the current funding system for higher education. This study was initiated at my request and an initial report has been published. This report makes it clear that immediate work is required to prepare for a longer term approach to a system that can be maintained through a sustainable funding base which will be able to address the continual expansion of the sector while protecting the quality of education. The HEA is continuing its work in this area and I will be advised further as this work progresses. The report will help inform decision-making as to the future funding of the sector.

Student Assistance Fund Issues

151. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will put in place a proper and fairer postgraduate loan scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41307/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I have no plans at present to introduce a loan scheme for postgraduate students. A number of financial institutions offer loans to assist students with costs associated with their studies. Following discussions with my Department, with support and advice from the National Treasury Management Agency, a specific loan initiative was introduced by Bank of Ireland in 2012 to provide finance for fees and living costs for postgraduate students.

Departmental Staff Remuneration

152. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of payable orders issued by his Department in the month of August 2013; the number of these issued to serving teachers, retired teachers, serving departmental staff, retired departmental staff, other parties; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41317/13]

153. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of payable orders issued by his Department in the month of September 2013; the number of these issued to serving teachers, retired teachers, serving departmental staff, retired departmental

staff, other parties; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41318/13]

154. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of serving teachers on his Department's payroll, retired teachers on his Department's payroll, serving departmental staff and retired departmental staff to whom moneys due to be paid in September 2013 are still awaiting payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41319/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I propose to take Questions Nos. 152 to 154, inclusive, together.

All Government Departments ceased to issue Payable Orders with effect from the 30th August 2013 under the Public Service Reform Plan. My Department issued a total of 247 Payable Orders in August 2013; 12 Payable Orders issued to serving primary/voluntary secondary school teachers; 165 Payable Orders issued to personnel paid on the payroll for retired teachers and non-teaching staff of Primary, Voluntary Secondary/Community and Comprehensive schools and their spouses and children; and 17 Payable orders issued to serving staff of my Department. 53 Payable Orders issued to payees not on payrolls operated by my Department. Retired Department staff are not paid by my Department. My Department did not issue any Payable Orders in the month of September 2013. My Department is awaiting bank account details from a total of 14 people so that their salary/pension can issue to them, bank details are awaited from 2 serving teachers, 10 personnel paid on the payroll for retired teachers and non-teaching staff of Primary, Voluntary Secondary/Community and Comprehensive schools and their spouses and children and 2 serving staff of my Department.

Institutes of Technology Issues

155. **Deputy Aodhán Ó Ríordáin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the significant contribution of money that has been paid by the Roman Catholic Church to the Dublin Institute of Technology Foundation for the maintenance of an active church, as distinct from a multi-faith centre, on the new DIT Grangegorman site and, if so, if he will detail all of the conditions attached to this donation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41320/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): DIT and the DIT Foundation have a target to raise €30m through philanthropy to support the redevelopment of listed buildings on the Grangegorman site and to target the provision of facilities that otherwise have no immediate source of funding. DIT approached the Dublin Catholic Archdiocese with a request to seek a contribution through philanthropy towards the restoration of the Church on the site. The Church is a listed building in need of substantial repair. The Catholic Archdiocese agreed to contribute €0.5m towards a fabric upgrade subject to the works progressing. The Church will be retained as a place of multi-denominational worship with a commitment of at least 25 years. The upgrade will create a multi-use space that will be available from September 2014 for educational, pastoral and cultural uses while respecting its liturgical requirements. In keeping with existing practice across DIT sites students and staff will have access to a multi-faith centre that will be located on campus from September 2014. Ownership of the Church will pass to DIT on completion of refurbishment. The initial expenditure will enable DIT to stabilise the fabric of the building while creating a much needed multi-use space. Further upgrades will again be undertaken through philanthropy.

Special Educational Needs Staffing

156. **Deputy Joe Higgins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills of those special needs

assistants who have recently been made redundant, the number on the panel established by his Department. [41369/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The detailed arrangements regarding supplementary assignment arrangements for SNAs for the 2013/2014 school year are set out in Departmental Circular 0037/2013 which issued on 1 July 2013 and which is available on the Department's website at the following address: http://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0037_2013.pdf.

With effect from 1 May 2013 once an SNA with a minimum of one year's service is notified by his/her employer that he/she is to be made redundant then he/she shall be deemed to be a member of a Supplementary Assignment Panel for SNAs. With the exception of SNAs who have been re-employed on permanent contracts or have chosen to opt out of the panel in accordance with the terms of Paragraph 39 of the circular, all SNAs who have been made redundant since 1 May 2013 are members of the SNA Supplementary Assignment Panel.

For the 2013/2014 school year a list of SNAs who have been deemed to be members of the Supplementary Assignment Panel will not be made or kept by the Department of Education and Skills. The operation of this panel is as described and outlined in Circular 0037/2013. This enables all eligible SNAs, who have the requisite SUPPLEMENTARY ASSIGNMENT PANEL FORM 2013/2014 completed by their former employer, to apply for any SNA position that is advertised by a school or an ETB with no geographical limitations imposed. The Department has set up a dedicated e-mail address to deal with all queries in relation to the SNA Supplementary Assignment Panel and any queries in respect of the operation of the Panel can be directed to this dedicated e-mail address snasupplementpanel@education.gov.ie.

Teaching Council of Ireland

157. **Deputy Olivia Mitchell** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the pay of a person (details supplied) whose membership of the Teaching Council lapsed over the summer due to a change of address, will be restored to include payment from the start of the teaching year after Garda vetting is processed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41380/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The person referred to by the Deputy continues to receive salary from my Department. Queries regarding Garda vetting and teacher registration are a matter for the Teaching Council. The teacher in question should contact the Teaching Council in regard to those issues.

Special Educational Needs Services Provision

158. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to correct the current imbalance in general allocation model, English as an additional language, GAM-EAL, support, based on gender, where the allocation of support is 25% higher in all boys and co-educational schools than in all girls schools and where there is an even higher allocation to Gaelscoileanna generally even through they have very few EAL pupils; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41395/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The Deputy is referring to resources allocated to schools under the General Allocation Model (GAM) of additional teaching supports, which are allocated to all Primary schools to cater for children with high incidence special educational needs. I wish to advise the Deputy that differing pupil teacher ratios are

applied under the GAM in relation to boys, girls and mixed schools in order to account for differentials of prevalence of learning difficulty between boys and girls. The objective of this differentiation is to ensure that resources provided to schools to support children who have additional learning needs are targeted to ensure that those children most in need benefit from these resources. The rationale for the differing ratios is based on international literature on the incidence of disability as well as international and national surveys of literacy and numeracy which indicate that there is a greater incidence of disability/learning difficulty in boys than girls. The NCSE Report on the Implementation of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act, of 2006, also examined a range of sources to establish prevalence rates, including national databases, local and international studies and expert estimates, which indicated significantly higher rates of Mild General Learning Difficulty and Specific Learning Disability prevailing in boys, in comparison to girls.

Resources are allocated to Gaelscoileanna on the same basis as to ordinary national schools, based on the number of classroom teaching posts in each school in the previous school year. There is no additional allocation mechanism for Gaelscoileanna in this regard. The criteria for the allocation of GAM hours is outlined in Circular 13/2013, which is available on my Department's website at www.education.ie.

School Staffing

159. **Deputy Kevin Humphreys** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the circumstances in which academic staff are permitted to return to paid teaching duties following retirement; the oversight mechanism there is; if these staff continue to draw their occupational pension while being employed on the double; the number of these academics who are teaching in their paid retirement; the length of time they may continue to do this; if there is a quarterly mechanism to oversee such numbers and to what section of the Oireachtas does oversight fall; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41400/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The policy of my Department is to ensure, as far as possible, that the Managerial Authorities of schools give priority to unemployed registered teachers who are fully qualified when filling vacant teaching posts. Thus my Department has issued a number of circulars addressing this issue in recent years. Under these circulars school Principal's must maintain a list of unemployed registered teachers and report to the Board of Management on any exceptional occasion where they have to engage a registered teacher who is retired. Circular 31/2011 details a cascade of measures for recruitment of teachers, prioritising registered teachers over retired registered teachers and unregistered people.

A retired teacher who returns to teaching on or after 1 February 2012 will commence at the first point of the incremental salary scale. Incremental credit for service prior to 1 February 2012, qualification allowances and certain job role allowances are also not payable. This measure 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. The first point of the teacher's salary scale represents the lowest point or starting salary for teachers. Thus it was decided that retired teachers would be placed at that point of the scale.

Schools Building Projects Status

160. **Deputy Dominic Hannigan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the new location of a school (details supplied) in County Meath; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41415/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The school to which the Deputy refers is among a range of schools earmarked for delivery through the Public Private Partnership (PPP) process. The PPP process forms a central part of the Government's overall economic stimulus package. This specific school was identified for inclusion in the PPP process in May 2013. It is expected that procurement of the bundle of schools to which this school belongs shall begin later this year. Construction of the overall bundle is provisionally scheduled to commence in 2015. Completion of construction should occur in 2016/2017.

Schools Building Projects Status

161. **Deputy Dominic Hannigan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the new location of a school building project (details supplied) in County Meath; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41416/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I can confirm to the Deputy that my Department has been working closely with Meath County Council in relation to identifying and acquiring a suitable site for the development to which he has referred. A suitable site has been identified and negotiations are ongoing. Due to commercial sensitivities attaching to site acquisitions generally, I am not in a position to comment further on this matter at this time.

Question No. 162 answered with Question No. 148.

Question No. 163 answered with Question No. 144.

State Examinations Issues

164. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the leaving certificate rechecks will be completed; if he will put a system in place to ensure that they will be dealt with at an earlier date in future. [41530/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The State Examinations Commission has statutory responsibility for operational matters relating to the certificate examinations including organising the holding of examinations, determining procedures in places where examinations are conducted including the supervision of examinations and making arrangements for the marking of work presented for examination and for appeals and rechecks. In view of this I have forwarded your query to the State Examinations Commission for direct reply to you.

Consultancy Contracts Expenditure

165. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the consultants, if any, he has contracted since 1 January 2013 to advise on the possible sale of any assets; the current situation; the advice given and the terms and cost of the contract; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41542/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): My Department has not contracted any consultants in 2013 to advise on the possible sale of assets.

Semi-State Bodies Dividends

166. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the €100 million extra in dividends from State companies provided for in budget 2013 represents a permanent change in the State's policy in respect of dividend pay-out from the commercial semi-State companies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41374/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The additional €100m in dividends from State companies, provided for in Budget 2013, is in addition to the normal dividends expected of State companies. In general, dividends of 30% of profits after tax have been sought of State companies in recent years. My Department, working with other relevant Departments and NewEra, which has been established to advise Government Departments on shareholder matters, is at present working on developing a new dividend policy for commercial state companies.

Departmental Staff Data

167. **Deputy Kevin Humphreys** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 459, 460, 461 and 462 of 18 September 2013, if he will provide a breakdown by number of hours of work given by staff of the Office of Public Works alongside the grade of the staff member, towards the drafting and provision of the design work, planning guidance and any other assistance provided by the Office of Public Works to the Irish Jewish Museum in the preparation and submission of its planning permission; the hours of work and the grade of staff that carried out same that has been required and deployed in preparing requested further information since the planning permission for the museum was appealed to An Bord Pleanála; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41311/13]

169. **Deputy Kevin Humphreys** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the Office of Public Works keeps a record of the work done in its design services division and monitors the number of hours of professional services that are deployed or required of an individual project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41313/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brian Hayes): I propose to take Questions Nos. 167 and 169 together.

I indicated in my response to the Deputy on 19 September 2013 that support for this project was met from within the OPW's standing capacity. Procedures are in place to monitor and manage the resource input by professional services in OPW. This includes the recording of the grade and contributed hours of all professional staff employed on the project. These records inform OPW management on the efficient use of and deployment of its resources. Where requirements arise to support initiatives or provide services outside of the strict parameters of a project timeline, as occurred in this instance, the recording of the full extent of such resource inputs is not as assiduously observed. Nevertheless an estimate of the technical contribution recorded from 2010 to 2013 on this project in regard to architectural, engineering and quantity surveying services equates to one person for 58 weeks.

Departmental Expenditure

168. **Deputy Kevin Humphreys** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 459, 460, 461 and 462 of 18 September 2013, if he will provide a breakdown of the costs incurred by the Office of Public Works, if any, in the contracting of outside professional services, or third party professionals, for the preparation of the design work, planning guidance and any other assistance provided by the OPW to the Irish Jewish Museum in the preparation and submission of its planning permission request to Dublin City Council; if the OPW arranged any such outside professional services for that purpose on the condition that a different body or person would pick up the cost; what those services were; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41312/13]

170. **Deputy Kevin Humphreys** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the Office of Public Works performed a hydro-geological assessment report for the Irish Jewish Museum at the request of An Bord Pleanála or in preparation of its original planning permis-

sion; if it did, the projected market cost of such work and the number of hours of staff time and their grade that are deployed or required for its completion; if it contracted the services in, the cost of such work and the persons that paid for it; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41314/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brian Hayes): I propose to take Questions Nos. 168 and 170 together.

The OPW, in the preparation of the planning application, commissioned the services of an external provider to undertake ground investigations to inform, the design and planning application process. The fees associated with that engagement were €8,066.90. Specialist planning advice, which did not exist within the OPW, was also commissioned to assist the planning process. Costs arising from that advice are expected to be in the region of €5,000. The OPW has not arranged any professional services on the basis that a different body or person would pick up the cost. It was indicated to the Irish Jewish Museum that certain professional engagements should be considered but responsibility for progressing with any or all of those is a matter for the Irish Jewish Museum. The OPW did not undertake a Hydro-geological Assessment Report as part of the planning application process nor has it contracted the services in.

Question No. 169 answered with Question No. 167.

Question No. 170 answered with Question No. 168.

Semi-State Bodies Dividends

171. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform further to Parliamentary Question No. 94 of 12 June 2013, if he will provide the net income for the years 2010, 2011 and 2012 for each of the commercial semi-State bodies listed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41375/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The information sought by the Deputy is available in the Annual Report and Accounts of the bodies in question. These Reports and Accounts are public information and can be seen on the websites of the companies.

Public Sector Pensions Issues

172. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the current situation regarding the public service pension reduction as it relates to combined or aggregated pensions and the application of the 28% reduction in same as provided for in the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2010 and amended by the Public Service Pensions (Single Scheme and Other Provisions) Act 2012; if he has signed an order setting a commencement date for this aggregation of public service pensions for public service pension reduction purposes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41535/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The aggregation of public service pensions for purposes of the Public Service Pension Reduction (PSPR) means that pensioners who have two or more qualifying public service pensions, which have a combined (pre-PSPR) value of over €32,500, have those pensions subjected to PSPR on a combined or aggregated basis, not separately as has previously been the case. I decided that this aggregation of public service pensions for purposes of imposing PSPR should commence on 1 September 2013, and in this connection I signed the Public Service Pensions (Single Scheme and Other Provisions) Act 2012 (Sections 68, 69, 70 and 71) (Commencement) Order 2013 (Statutory Instrument No. 314 of 2013). The imposition of revised PSPR amounts in respect

of aggregation-affected public service pensioners is underway across public service pensioner payrolls. For the subset of such pensioners whose public service pension income exceeds €100,000, the 28% reduction rate duly applies to the excess over €100,000.

Health and Safety Inspections

173. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the reason pre-1979 service stations are being inspected; the reason unreasonable requests are being asked of them from a representative of the Health and Safety Authority (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41493/13]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department has lead responsibility for the Dangerous Substances legislative regime. The Dangerous Substances Acts 1972 and 1979, together with a series of Regulations under this legislation, set out the legal framework under which petroleum and other dangerous substances are regulated. The storage of petrol is governed by the Dangerous Substances (Retail and Private Petroleum Stores) Regulations, S.I. 311 of 1979, as amended. The Act requires that all petrol storage facilities must be licensed. The Regulations set minimum requirements that apply equally to private petrol stores and storage for the purpose of retail sale (petrol filling stations).

The 1979 Regulations have been kept under continuing review and while operating within the regulatory regime set out above, Inspectors from the Health & Safety Authority (HSA) are sensitive to the economic situation of the operators to which it applies. This approach is in line with the general approach taken in occupational health and safety legislation and aims to avoid the imposition of undue hardship on owners of kerbside stations that do not meet the 1979 requirements.

To clarify, the licensing of petrol stations, run by private operators, is a matter for Local Authorities [or Harbour Authorities]. Under the aegis of my Department, the HSA has an enforcement function under the Dangerous Substances Acts, and a very limited licensing function in that it is the body that licenses petrol stations run by a Local/ Harbour Authority. It also has a licensing appeals function.

In the course of an inspection the Authority will normally require the operator to apply to their Local Authority (LA) for a Dangerous Substance licence if one is not already in place, and will advise the operator that they will be required by the LA to comply with SI 311 of 1979 as far as possible, bearing in mind also the specific exemptions allowed for older “Kerbside” petrol stations in S.I. 528 of 2012. These exemption regulations allow for derogations from certain provisions of the 1979 Regulations, for these “Kerbside” petrol stations, as they were in existence prior to the coming into force of the 1979 regulations, and for various socioeconomic reasons were allowed to continue in operation under the special exemption provisions.

Notwithstanding the approach taken by HSA Inspectors in implementing the 1979 Regulations, it must be reiterated that petrol filling stations are particularly hazardous workplaces which require to be licensed by Local Authorities. The HSA continues to provide suitable guidance to all petrol station operators to ensure that they can comply with the relevant legislation in this area.

Departmental Correspondence

174. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the reason a memorandum dated 20 March 2002 from the Department and the facts therein, which had been the subject of numerous parliamentary questions in 2004, were denied and concealed by

the Department until they were disclosed in a freedom of information inquiry to a third party in 2008. [41401/13]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): From the records available, I can confirm that the inter-departmental memo, dated 20 March 2002, between this Department and Department of Finance, was released by Department of Finance under a freedom of information request on 17 August 2004. A copy of this document was also released by this Department under a freedom of information request on 11 March 2010.

Industrial Relations Issues

175. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation his views on correspondence (details supplied) regarding the termination of employment in respect of a person in County Cork. [41489/13]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): My office has been in correspondence with the person involved following upon his writing to me on this issue on 19 September last. The person in question, who has lost their job, has sought to have the matter settled, ideally, through mediation. Officials of my Department brought the matter to the attention of the Labour Relations Commission and the Commission has offered to make the resources of the workplace Mediation and Conciliation Service available should this person wish to avail of its assistance in seeking a resolution in this manner. Details of where further assistance may be sought and how to make an application for the above services were included in my letter.

While providing assistance in the resolution of individual and collective disputes falls within the purview of my Department, issues with regard to Bord Gáis Éireann and Irish Water are a matter for my Ministerial colleagues Pat Rabbitte, TD, Minister for Communications Energy and Natural Resources, and Phil Hogan, TD, Minister for Environment, Community and Local Government respectively.

Job Creation

176. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if he will provide in tabular form on a county basis for 2011 and 2012 each job created and-or sustained by each county enterprise board; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41534/13]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The information requested by the Deputy in relation to the number of jobs created and sustained by the County Enterprise Boards (CEBs) for 2011 and 2012 are set out in the following Table.

Table: CEB Employment Statistics 2011 + 2012

County	2012		2011	
	Full Time Gains	Other Time Gains	Full Time Gains	Other Time Gains
Carlow	254	165	190	60
Cavan	138	150	154	95
Clare	200	105	56	44
Cork City	52	19	41	15
Cork North	59	12	57	12

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County	-	2012	-	2011
Cork South	179	97	164	113
Cork West	83	58	77	102
Donegal	131	255	310	236
Dublin City	382	183	293	143
Dublin Dun Laoghaire/Rath- down	337	511	159	98
Dublin Fingal	240	135	98	163
Dublin South	168	135	122	101
Galway County/ City	124	78	250	78
Kerry	316	199	348	399
Kildare	133	77	106	135
Kilkenny	84	30	151	103
Laois	69	98	136	178
Leitrim	35	32	61	80
Limerick City	100	96	174	82
Limerick County	73	2	190	92
Longford	79	55	117	81
Louth	148	84	255	194
Mayo	43	35	63	48
Meath	175	145	358	120
Monaghan	120	83	111	95
Offaly	75	41	224	69
Roscommon	81	53	107	63
Sligo	117	144	121	156
Tipperary(NR)	41	53	88	32
Tipperary(SR)	53	10	77	60
Waterford City	76	64	178	85
Waterford County	110	97	59	50
Westmeath	130	97	188	169
Wexford	269	140	167	148
Wicklow	184	234	81	145
Grand Total	4,858	3,772	5,331	3,844

Consultancy Contracts Expenditure

177. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the consultants, if any, he has contracted since 1 January 2013 to advise on the possible sale of any assets; the current situation; the advice given and the terms and cost of the contract; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41547/13]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department's Asset Register is comprised of assets used in the day to day business of the Department such as IT hardware, software and furniture and fittings. My Department has not contracted any consultants to advise on the possible sale of any assets since 1 January 2013. My Department

does not own any other assets.

Budget 2014

178. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will ensure the back to education allowance is not cut in budget 2014; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [41304/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Revised Estimates for the Department provide for expenditure of over €189 million in 2013 on back to education allowance in relation to an estimated 23,350 recipients. The Deputy will be aware that the Expenditure Report 2013 published by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform last December provides for additional new expenditure reduction measures of €440 million to be achieved in 2014 in the Department of Social Protection budget. The Government will shortly finalise its consideration of the Budget having regard to all of its commitments, including the commitment in the Programme for Government to maintain primary weekly welfare rates. The outcome of this process will be announced on Budget Day.

Social Insurance Yield

179. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Social Protection the yield that would be achieved from increasing employer's PRSI to 12%, 13%, 14% and 15%, respectively, for the portion of salary over €100,000; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [41366/13]

180. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Social Protection the yield that would be achieved from increasing employer's PRSI to 12%, 13%, 14% and 15%, respectively, for the portion of salary over €125,000; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [41367/13]

181. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Social Protection the yield that would be achieved from increasing employer's PRSI to 12%, 13%, 14% and 15%, respectively, for the portion of salary over €150,000; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [41368/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 179 to 181, inclusive, together.

The table below gives the estimated yield that would be achieved from increasing Employer PRSI from 10.75% to 12%, 13%, 14% and 15% respectively. The percentage increases in Employer PRSI are applied to income in excess of the thresholds specified by the Deputy.

Threshold for higher Employer PRSI	Rate of Employer PRSI	Cost/Yield	No. of Employments
-	-	(€000)	-
€100,000	*12%	29,785	41,160
€100,000	*13%	53,614	41,160
€100,000	*14%	77,442	41,160

Threshold for higher Employer PRSI	Rate of Employer PRSI	Cost/Yield	No. of Employments
€100,000	*15%	101,270	41,160
€125,000	*12%	21,137	24,710
€125,000	*13%	38,047	24,710
€125,000	*14%	54,957	24,710
€125,000	*15%	71,867	24,710
€150,000	*12%	15,874	16,590
€150,000	*13%	28,573	16,590
€150,000	*14%	41,272	16,590
€150,000	*15%	53,972	16,590

*The National Training Fund Levy of 0.70% is included in the contribution.

Jobseeker's Allowance Appeals

182. **Deputy Eric Byrne** asked the Minister for Social Protection the rationale behind a decision not to award a payment to a person (details supplied); if this decision may be reviewed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [41235/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The person concerned had been receiving Jobseeker's Benefit until 20 July 2013. His claim was then examined to determine his entitlement to Jobseeker's Allowance. This is a means-tested payment. His wife is in employment and after applying the relevant criteria to her income she is deemed to be earning in excess of the amount permitted under legislation. This decision has been appealed but no decision has yet been made by the Appeals Office.

Disability Allowance Appeals

183. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Social Protection the position regarding a disability allowance appeal in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Mayo; if same can be expedited; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [41236/13]

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 12 July 2013. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant papers and comments by or on behalf of the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought from the Department of Social Protection. These papers have been received in the Social Welfare Appeals Office and the case will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing. The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

Carer's Allowance Appeals

184. **Deputy Noel Coonan** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a decision on a carer's allowance appeal will issue in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Tipperary; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [41248/13]

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 29 July 2013. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant Departmental papers and comments by the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought. When these have been received from the Department, the case in question will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral 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 in relation to social welfare entitlements.

National Internship Scheme Administration

185. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of meetings of the JobBridge steering group to date; if she will provide a breakdown of all costs associated with the steering group including any remuneration or allowances received by non-civil servant members of the group. [41255/13]

186. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 101, 107 and 108 on 25 September 2013, in which she advised that 63% of all internships are completed early due to the intern securing paid employment, the proportion of these who entered full-time employment and how many entered permanent, fixed-term or zero hour contract posts, respectively; if such data are collated, and, if not, if she will make arrangements to do so in future. [41256/13]

187. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Social Protection further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 101, 107 and 108 of 25 September 2013, the number of interns who finished early and returned to education, went back to receiving jobseeker's allowance or another social welfare payment or emigrated. [41257/13]

188. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of hours the 21,000 participants on JobBridge have worked to date; the total cost of JobBridge to the State so far; and if she will provide a breakdown of same. [41258/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 185 to 188, inclusive, together.

The JobBridge National Steering Committee met 6 times in 2013; 7 times in 2012 and 6 times in 2011. The participation of members of the National Steering Committee is not remunerated. They receive no allowances to cover expenses. The meetings are generally held in the Department of Social Protection's premises. There has been no venue costs to-date. €25.50 has been spent on catering for meetings over the period 2012-2013.

In relation to the status of employment secured since completing their internship, the Indecon report stated the following:

- 45.2% progressed into full-time, permanent employment;
- 9.3% progressed into part-time, permanent employment;
- 35.0% progressed into full-time, temporary employment;
- 10.5% progressed into part-time, temporary employment.

The total number of finishers to-date is 15,686. At the time of completing their internship, a

total of 638 individuals went into further education or training, of whom 500 finished early. A total of 233 individuals emigrated, of whom 198 finished early, and a total of 2,563 returned to job search, that is, to receipt of a relevant Social Welfare payment, of whom 371 finished early. Of the total number of finishers to-date, the largest category of progression outcome was into paid employment.

JobBridge interns are required to work for between 30 and 40 hours per week. Within those limits, the hours worked by each individual intern are a matter for the host organisation in agreement with the intern. The total cost of the top-up allowances since Scheme inception in July 2011 has been €22.5m.

The Indecon Report found that even using conservative assumptions for deadweight and for social welfare payments, JobBridge achieves a net benefit to the Exchequer provided that those who have secured jobs remain in employment on average for 5.5 months. If participants remain in employment for one year or more, the net benefits increase significantly.

Local Authority Work Placement Programme

189. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 111 of 25 September, the timeframe that is intended for placements to last, the rate of payment the participants receive, the level and types of training that will be provided to participants and what budget will be allocated for training. [41259/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Gateway is a new initiative between my Department and county and city councils, the objective being to providing 3,000 part-time quality work placements by the end of the first quarter 2014. Participants will be randomly selected for this initiative by this Department from those on the Live Register for 24 months or more and currently in receipt of a jobseekers payment. Those agreeing to be considered then have their contact details referred to the appropriate council for recruitment. Participants will be offered the opportunity to work for up to 22 months only and will receive a payment equivalent to their rate of jobseeker's allowance plus €20 per week, with a minimum payment of €208 per week.

The design of Gateway has been largely completed and local authorities have been engaged in a process of identifying the nature and range of work opportunities that can be made available across their administrative and operational areas. The primary focus of Gateway is to improve the employability and work readiness of participants by providing them with opportunities to put their work skills into practice and to learn new skills to enable them to progress to work, further education or other development opportunities. In line with Pathways to Work, Gateway will provide, for those selected, opportunities to maintain work readiness and to bridge the gap between unemployment and re-entering the workforce.

County and city councils will have primary responsibility for identifying and arranging for the delivery of training requirements. The Government has provided funding of €2.835 million from the Dormant Accounts Fund to defray the costs of inputs and compliance/training costs. The process of identifying work opportunities is currently underway in each county and city council, including the necessary consultation with stakeholders.

Local Authority Work Placement Programme

190. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Social Protection in view of the

recruitment embargo on local authorities, the employment opportunities envisaged under the new Gateway scheme. [41260/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Gateway aims to improve the employability and work readiness of participants by providing them with the opportunities to put their work skills into practice and to learn new skills to enable them to progress to work, further education or other development opportunities. In line with Pathways to Work, Gateway will provide, for those selected, opportunities to maintain work readiness and to bridge the gap between unemployment and re-entering the workforce. The process of identifying work opportunities is currently underway in each county and city council, including the necessary consultation with stakeholders.

The Deputy will appreciate that my Department has no role in determining the positions that might be made available within each council given the range of services that county and city councils deliver. I understand, however, that a variety of tasks will be identified and made available to Gateway participants. This will include a mixture of new opportunities and opportunities to work in services that have not been provided by county and city councils due to the pressure of scarce resources.

Labour Activation Projects

191. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Social Protection the consideration given to immediately offering ECDL, manual handling, first aid and safe pass courses to those recipients of jobseeker's allowance and JobBridge who would like to participate in them when they are first awarded their payment. [41261/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Formal offers of a place on a suitable full-time training course are made to persons in receipt of Jobseeker's Allowance as part of the Department's activation process. The timing and nature of an offer depends on the Jobseeker's individual characteristics, the availability of training places and the demand by employers for staff with particular skills. Some of the courses cited are available primarily on a part-time/evening basis through FÁS. There is no charge to attend these evening courses for persons in receipt of Jobseeker's Allowance, including persons who are on a JobBridge internship.

Property Taxation Collection

192. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Social Protection if Tús scheme participants are having the property tax deducted from their allowance; if so, if they have been informed of these deductions; and, if not, the reason that is so and how the rate of deduction has been calculated. [41262/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): In line with the arrangements in place by the Revenue Commissioners for the local property tax (LPT), property owners can voluntarily opt to have their liabilities met by deduction at source from salary or occupational pension. This includes Tús participants. Where individuals do not submit an LPT return or fail to meet their LPT payment obligations, mandatory deduction at source from salary or occupational pension will be imposed by the Revenue Commissioners. Employers/pension providers will not know from a taxpayer's tax credit certificates whether the LPT was chosen voluntarily or imposed mandatorily. All certificates simply show the amount of LPT to be deducted.

How a liable person is informed of LPT deductions is a matter for the taxpayer and the

Revenue Commissioners. My Department, or its payroll agent, does not have any role in such matters, other than facilitating the arrangements set out in respect of the LPT.

Labour Activation Projects

193. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will provide an update on the progress made in delivering targets under Pathways to Work; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [41265/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): As per the commitment made under Action 52 of the Action Plan for Jobs, my Department releases a quarterly report on performance against the Pathways to Work targets. The Pathways to Work Performance report for Quarter 2 is available at www.welfare.ie at the following link: <http://www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/Your-Pathway-to-Work.aspx>.

Free Travel Scheme Administration

194. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Social Protection in view of the policy position of the National Transport Authority to tender the provision of the bus service both nationally and in Dublin, the steps she has taken to ensure that the free travel pass will be accepted on all of these new services; if she has had discussions with the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport on this matter; the result of these discussions; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [41266/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I understand that the National Transport Authority (NTA) earlier this month launched a public consultation process on its plans to enter into another direct award contract with Dublin Bus and Bus Éireann from December 2014, to amend those contracts in 2016 to reduce the services within those contracts by approximately 10% and, to provide the removed services through separate contracts following an open tender process.

At present, the free travel scheme operated by my Department can be used on services provided by CIE, Luas and some 90 private operators. The changes proposed by the NTA would have no impact on services until after 2016 when there could be additional operators providing the “removed services”. An interdepartmental group, chaired by my Department and including the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport and the NTA, is currently examining the free travel scheme. This is one of the issues which will be considered as part of that review.

Pensions Regulation

195. **Deputy Michael McCarthy** asked the Minister for Social Protection the position regarding the ESB occupational pension scheme; the date on which the description of this scheme was changed to a defined contribution scheme; if she will outline the details regarding the Pensions Board’s decision to wind up the scheme; if she will acknowledge the genuine concerns of active ESB staff who do not generally have an entitlement to a State pension; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [41273/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I cannot comment on issues relating to a particular pension scheme. The Pensions Board supervises the regulation of individual schemes in accordance with the Pensions Act.

Mortgage Interest Relief Application

196. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of persons to whom her Department is paying mortgage interest supplement; the minimum mortgage interest supplement amount per month paid to a person; the maximum mortgage interest supplement amount per month paid to a person; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [41282/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Mortgage interest supplement provides short-term income support to eligible people who are unable to meet their mortgage interest repayments in respect of a house which is their sole place of residence. There are currently approximately 11,300 mortgage interest supplement recipients for which the Government has provided almost €41.8 million in 2013. The Department is compiling the information in respect of the minimum and maximum monthly amounts paid under the scheme and will shortly forward this information to the Deputy.

Farm Assist Scheme Appeals

197. **Deputy Heather Humphreys** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a decision will issue on a farm assist appeal in respect of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [41329/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that the appeal from the person concerned was referred to an Appeals Officer who has decided to convene an oral hearing in this case. Every effort will be made to hear the case as quickly as possible and the appellant will be informed as soon as arrangements for the oral hearing have been made. 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 in relation to social welfare entitlements.

Question No. 198 withdrawn.

Consultancy Contracts Expenditure

199. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Social Protection the consultants, if any, she has contracted since 1 January 2013 to advise on the possible sale of any assets; the current situation; the advice given and the terms and cost of the contract; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [41550/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): No consultants have been contracted by me or my Department, since 1 January 2013, to advise on the possible sale of any assets.

Consultancy Contracts Expenditure

200. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the consultants, if any, he has contracted since 1 January 2013 to advise on the possible sale of any assets; the current situation; the advice given and the terms and cost of the contract; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41538/13]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan): My Department has not engaged any consultants for the purposes outlined by the Deputy.

Garda Investigations

201. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if there has been any investigation by Irish authorities regarding the dealings of a former prominent senior executive editor in Irish media circles (details supplied). [41403/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): Any criminal investigation such as the one referred to in this case by the Deputy is a matter for An Garda Síochána and not one in which my Department or I, as Minister, have a role.

Renewable Energy Generation Targets

202. **Deputy Regina Doherty** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the timescale for a new national renewable energy programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41488/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): The development of renewable energy is at the heart of this Government's energy policy. A long term perspective is key to achieving this objective. To this end, my Department's Strategy for Renewable Energy, published in May 2012, sets out key strategic goals for the various renewable energy sectors in the period to 2020. This strategy complements and builds on the momentum that has developed from the implementation of the measures set out in the National Renewable Energy Action Plan (NREAP). Article 22 of the Renewables Directive, 2009/28/EC requires Member States to submit a report to the European Commission on progress in the promotion and use of energy from renewable sources by 31 December 2011 and every two years thereafter. Ireland's second progress report on the NREAP is therefore due by the end of this year and work on this is currently underway.

Consultancy Contracts Expenditure

203. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the consultants, if any, he has contracted since 1 January 2013 to advise on the possible sale of any assets; the current situation; the advice given and the terms and cost of the contract; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41540/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): I have not contracted with any consultants on the possible sale of any assets. NewERA is leading on the advice to Government with regard to the sale of State assets and, in that context, are engaging advisers as required.

Non-Principal Private Residence Charge Yield

204. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the yield that would be achieved from retaining the non-principal private residence tax in 2014 at €200 for properties valued at up to €200,000 and €300 for properties valued in excess of €200,000; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41365/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): The Local Government (Charges) Act 2009 broadened the revenue base of local authorities by introducing a charge on non-principal private residences. The self-assessed charge is set at €200 per annum and liability for it falls, in the main, on owners of rental, holiday and vacant properties. The Non Principal Private Residence Charge is not related to the value of a property. As such, I am not aware of the number of properties which are valued in excess of €200,000 and which are liable for the charge. I am therefore unable to estimate the financial

benefit of increasing the Charge for properties valued above a €200,000 threshold.

I understand that the Non Principal Private Residence Charge has raised €75.7m in respect of 2012 liabilities to date, a portion of which has been collected in 2013. 2013 will be the final year of the operation of the Charge. The Local Property Tax has been introduced on a half year basis this year and accordingly 50% of the Tax is payable in 2013. From 2014, the Tax will operate on a full year basis.

Commercial Rates Issues

205. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government on behalf of Early Childhood Ireland, regarding commercial rates, which are of serious concern and stress for the services in Ireland, and in view of the fact that they are levied unfairly and inconsistently on early childhood care and education services and pose a serious threat to the sustainability of a sector that currently employs in a region of 22,500 staff, the discrepancies that exist in the percentage of services by county of commercial rates, which vary from 11% of the notified services in one county to 71% in another; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41414/13]

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 Commissioner of Valuation has sole responsibility for all valuation matters. With regard to the application of rates to child-care facilities, where child-care provision is within a community facility, operating in 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. The factors that influence local authority members' decisions on the ARV include the level of services to be provided by the local authority and the income available from all other sources to fund these services. Therefore, elected members adopt the ARV that they consider necessary to provide the range of services for the communities, including businesses, in their area. 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.

Postal Voting

206. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the position regarding postal votes for persons who are working here but away from home on shift work and not able to get home to vote; if they will qualify for a postal vote; the criteria for postal votes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41264/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): In order to be able to vote at elections and referendums, a person's name must be entered in the register of electors for a constituency in the State in which the person ordinarily resides. Postal voting is provided for in electoral law in respect of certain categories of person who are entered in the register of electors - whole-time members of the Defence Forces; members of the Garda Síochána; Irish diplomats serving abroad and their spouses or civil partners; electors living at home who are unable to vote because of a physical illness or a physical disability; electors whose occupation, service or employment makes it likely that they will be unable to vote in person at their local polling station on polling day and full-time students registered at their home

who are living elsewhere while attending an educational institution in the State; certain election staff employed at the poll outside the constituency where they reside; and electors who because of the circumstances of their detention in prison pursuant to an order of a court are likely to be unable to go in person on polling day to vote. Qualifying voters can apply to their local City or County Council, as appropriate, for inclusion in the postal voters lists.

Referendum Expenditure

207. **Deputy Aodhán Ó Ríordáin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the way temporary staff were hired to work as polling tellers and clerks for the upcoming Seanad and court of appeal referendums; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41330/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): The primary role of my Department in electoral matters is to provide an appropriate policy and legislative framework for a modern and efficient electoral system. Within that framework, local returning officers are responsible for all matters in connection with the actual conduct of elections and referendums, including the selection, appointment and training of polling station and count staff in accordance with the relevant provisions of electoral law. My Department issues guidance to Returning Officers in advance of each election and referendum. The guidance emphasises that the smooth conduct of polls is dependent on maintaining a cadre of sufficiently skilled and experienced people. Having regard to that overall objective, returning officers are advised to employ competent and efficient persons as polling staff and asked to give consideration, where possible, to employing suitable persons who are unemployed, particularly for the position of polling clerk where the responsibilities of the post can be fulfilled under the guidance of the Presiding Officer.

Leader Programmes Applications

208. **Deputy Michael McCarthy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will give approval at an early date for the allocation of funds through the West Cork Development Partnership in respect of a development (details supplied) in County Cork. [41338/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): My Department continues to monitor the situation with regard to the allocation and drawdown of funding under the LEADER elements of the Rural Development Programme 2007-2013 (RDP). I advised all Local Development Companies (LDCs), including West Cork Development Partnership, of their revised Programme allocations in May 2013 and LDCs were given until 31 August to allocate any remaining available funding to ensure that all funding is allocated before the end of 2013. I understand that the project in question was not approved.

Currently there is approximately €20m in potential commitments at various stages of assessment with my Department and I envisage that this process will be complete by the end of October 2013. Following this, all LDCs, including West Cork Development Partnership, will be informed if there is any availability of unallocated funds with a view to reaching full programme commitment by the end of 2013. As the principal decision maker on project funding, it will be the responsibility of the LDC to determine what projects are allocated funding, should additional funding become available from the above process. I understand that the project in question is approved in principle.

Planning Issues

209. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and

Local Government the assistance provided to a person (details supplied) in County Kildare who is having issues with a property next door; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41378/13]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): There is no legislation in Ireland regulating the height of trees and hedges. However, there is a civil remedy, of nuisance, available in respect of the branches or roots of a neighbour’s trees encroaching on one’s property. Complaints relating to such matters are normally addressed, where necessary, under civil law between the parties concerned.

Water Services Provision

210. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 383 of 24 September 2013, if a house owner or the local authority is responsible for leaks or sewerage blockages outside of a home owner’s boundary located on a public footpath or road in view of information from Cork County Council (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41398/13]

211. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 384 of 24 September 2013, if there are grants available to assist home owners to replace leaking pipes or collapsed sewers where the problem occurs outside their boundary under a public footpath or road in view of information provided by Cork County Council (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41404/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): I propose taking Questions Nos. 210 and 211 together.

The Water Services Act 2007 provides that where a property is connected to a public water or waste water system the property owner is only responsible for the maintenance and replacement of any water or wastewater pipes, connections or distribution systems which are connected within the boundary of their premises. It would not be appropriate to provide a grant system for the replacement of leaking pipes outside a home-owner’s property.

My Department’s Water Services Investment Programme funds 90% of the costs incurred by local authorities in addressing water mains rehabilitation. The Water Services Investment Programme 2010-2013 builds on existing investment in water conservation, which has seen over €247 million spent on various water conservation measures between 2003 and 2012. Over the past number of years, annual expenditure on water conservation has been in the range of €30-€40m.

Mortgage Arrears Proposals

212. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his views on correspondence regarding eviction (details supplied). [41526/13]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): While I cannot comment on individual cases, I am acutely conscious of the difficulties many households are facing in terms of mortgage arrears. Where any borrower, either from a local authority or from a private financial institution, is facing difficulties in meeting mortgage repayments, proactive and constructive engagement with the lender to seek to achieve an agreed solution is the recommended approach. The services of the Money Advice and Budgeting Service are also available to such borrowers and support is avail-

able through the Supplementary Welfare Allowance Scheme.

As part of the Government's implementation of the recommendations in the Keane Report, my Department has developed a "mortgage to rent" scheme for households with commercial mortgages that:

- have had their mortgage position deemed unsustainable under a Mortgage Arrears Resolution Process (MARP), as provided for under the Central Bank's Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears;
- agree to the voluntary surrender of their home;
- do not have significant positive equity; and
- are eligible for social housing.

This scheme was extended nationally in June 2012, targeting those low income families whose mortgage situation is unsustainable and where there is little or no prospect of a significant change in circumstances in the foreseeable future. The scheme ensures that the family remains in their home, while ownership is transferred to an approved housing body who in turn rent it to the original owners. Eligibility requirements are in line with other forms of social housing support. A pilot mortgage to rent scheme for the most acute cases of local authority mortgage arrears is currently being operated by Westmeath County and Dublin City Councils ahead of national implementation later this year.

Consultancy Contracts Expenditure

213. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the consultants, if any, he has contracted since 1 January 2013 to advise on the possible sale of any assets; the current situation; the advice given and the terms and cost of the contract; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41543/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): My Department has not contracted any consultants to advise on the possible sale of any assets since 1 January 2013.

Naturalisation Applications

214. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will examine and expedite a naturalisation application in respect of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41232/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): Officials in the Citizenship Division of the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) inform me that there is no record of an application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to in the Deputy's question. However, the person concerned has made an application for permission to remain in the State on the basis of his marriage to an Irish national. I am advised that the processing of this application is at its final stage and that a decision is expected shortly.

Section 15 of the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended, provides that the Minister may, in his absolute discretion, grant an application for a certificate of naturalisation provided certain statutory conditions are fulfilled. The conditions are that the applicant must

- be of full age
- be of good character

- have had a period of one year's continuous residency in the State immediately before the date of application and, during the eight years immediately preceding that period, have had a total residence in the State amounting to four years

- intend in good faith to continue to reside in the State after naturalisation have, before a judge of the District Court in open court, in a citizenship ceremony or in such manner as the Minister, for special reasons, allows—

(i) made a declaration, in the prescribed manner, of fidelity to the nation and loyalty to the State, and

(ii) undertaken to faithfully observe the laws of the State and to respect its democratic values.

A foreign national who is married to, or is the Civil Partner of, an Irish citizen for at least three years may apply for naturalisation under section 15A of the Irish Naturalisation and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended, where they have been continuously resident in the island of Ireland for the year immediately prior to the date of their application and for two out of the four years prior to that year. The marriage or civil partnership must be subsisting and recognised under Irish law. Section 15A provides that the Minister may waive certain conditions for naturalisation if satisfied that the applicant would suffer serious consequences in respect of his or her bodily integrity or liberty if not granted Irish citizenship.

Section 16 of the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended, provides that the Minister may, in his absolute discretion, waive some or all of the statutory conditions in certain circumstances i.e. where an applicant is of Irish descent or of Irish associations; where an applicant is a person who is a refugee within the meaning of the United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees; or where an applicant is a Stateless person within the meaning of the United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Stateless persons. It is open to any individual to lodge an application for citizenship if and when they are in a position to meet the statutory requirements as prescribed in the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956 as amended.

Garda Stations Expenditure

215. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding the acquisition of a new premises for a Garda Station (details supplied) in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41238/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): As the Deputy will be aware, the purchase of a premises for a new Garda station for Glanmire is currently the subject of legal proceedings. In the circumstances, it would not be appropriate for me to comment in relation to this matter.

Garda Operations

216. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the cost and the number of extra gardaí that were employed to police Arthur's Day; if he will be billing the promoter of the event; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41252/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I have sought the relevant information from the Garda authorities and I will contact the Deputy further in relation to this matter as soon as possible.

Garda Operations

217. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the cost and the number of extra gardaí that were employed to police the All-Ireland finals this year; if the GAA is billed for the event; the amount of policing costs which is recouped for concerts in general, across the various stadia throughout the country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41253/13]

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 details of the Garda non public duty costs associated with the policing of the 2013 All Ireland Finals at Croke Park have not yet been finalised. These costs are met by the GAA.

The table below has been provided by the Garda authorities and it outlines the monies recouped to An Garda Síochána for policing services at various events over the period Jan 2012 to September 2013:

Category	2012 Monies Received	2013 (Jan – Sept) Monies Received
Sporting Fixtures	1,954,323	596,483
Concerts/Festivals	738,284	112,592
Other Events	1,431,949	719,879
Total	4,124,556	1,428,954

Land Repossessions

218. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason, despite the 2009 Land Conveyancing and Law Reform Act having abolished the powers of the sheriff under section 133, which states that the power of the sheriff or of other persons entitled to exercise the sheriff’s powers to seize a tenancy under a writ of *fieri facias* or other process of execution is abolished, except in relation to a tenancy of land that is used wholly or partly for the purpose of carrying on a business, the sheriff is still exercising his power in seizing tenancy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41309/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The position is that section 133 of the Land and Conveyancing Law Reform Act 2009, which entered into force on 1 December 2009, abolished the sheriff’s power to seize a tenancy under a writ of *fieri facias* except where the land is used wholly or partly for business purposes. Section 131 provides that the term “business” has the same meaning as in the Landlord and Tenant (Amendment) Act 1980. The Deputy will appreciate that sheriffs are not directly accountable to the Minister for Justice and Equality in the performance of their statutory functions.

The operation of the law in this area had been reviewed by the Law Reform Commission in its ‘Report on Debt Collection: (1) The Law relating to Sheriffs’, and reform was subsequently recommended in its 2004 Consultation Paper ‘Reform and Modernisation of Land Law and Conveyancing Law’ which formed the basis for the 2009 Act.

Criminal Assets Bureau

219. **Deputy Patrick Nulty** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons employed by the Criminal Assets Bureau in each year from 2008 to date 2013. [41322/13]

220. **Deputy Patrick Nulty** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the annual budget of the Criminal Assets Bureau in each year from 2008 to 2013, inclusive. [41323/13]

221. **Deputy Patrick Nulty** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of cases against persons by the Criminal Assets Bureau in each year 2008 to 2013, inclusive. [41324/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I propose to take Questions Nos. 219 to 221, inclusive, together.

The resources provided to the Criminal Assets Bureau in terms of budget and staffing numbers for the period 2008-2013 inclusive are set out in table 1. Available data on the numbers of orders obtained under the Proceeds of Crime Act 1996 and 2005 and on the number of cases taken under the Revenue and Social Welfare remit of the Bureau for the period 2008-2013 to date is set out in tables 2-4 below. Further more detailed information concerning the operation of the Bureau is published in the Annual Reports of the Bureau which are made available at www.justice.ie and www.garda.ie.

Table 1: CAB Budget & Staff employed 2008-2013

Year	Budget Outturn	Staff employed
2013	€6,940,000 *	70**
2012	€6,410,000	70
2011	€6,673,000	70
2010	€6,531,000	68
2009	€6,877,000	69
2008	€7,509,000	68

* 2013 Budget allocation as per revised estimates

** 70 authorised (2 vacancies currently being filled) as at 1 October 2013.

Table 2 : Orders taken under the Proceeds of Crime Act 1996 and 2005 for the period 2008-2013

Description re Proceeds of Crime Acts	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013*
Interim orders under Section 2	24	17	14	6	16	N/A
Interlocutory Orders under Section 3 (1)	14	16	17	19	10	N/A
Variation Orders under Section 2 (3)	1	-	-	-	-	N/A
Variation Orders under Section 3 (3)	1	2	3	5	2	N/A
Disposal Orders under Section 4	2	7	-	8	7	N/A
Consent Disposal Orders under Section 4 (a)	11	9	12	15	5	N/A
Receivership Orders under Section 7	25	20	15	16	16	N/A
TOTALS	78	71	61	69	56	N/A

*Please note that figures for 2013 have yet to be compiled

Table 3 : No. of cases taken under the Revenue remit of CAB 2008-2013 to date

Description	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013 to date*
Cases taken under the Revenue remit	31	21	32	34	30	11

Table 4 : No. of cases taken under the Social Welfare remit of CAB 2008-2013 to date

Description	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013 to date*
Cases taken under the Social Welfare remit	13	28	34	27	28	30

* As at 1 October 2013

Deportation Orders Re-examination

222. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will re-examine the case of a person (details supplied) in County Longford in respect of whom a deportation order has been made but whose case also merits further consideration in view of the fact that many of his family and local community members in his homeland were executed and that there is considerable evidence to suggest that his life is in danger if he returned to his homeland; if the deportation order will be revoked pending a full investigation, notwithstanding the previous assessment of the case and keeping in mind that considerable change in circumstances has taken place since 2004; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41334/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): As the Deputy is aware the person referred to is the subject of a Deportation Order signed on 11 March 2005. The Deportation Order was made following a comprehensive and thorough examination of his asylum claim and of his application to remain temporarily in the State. He has been evading his deportation since 19 May 2005 and should he come to the notice of the Garda authorities, he would be liable to arrest and detention. He should, therefore, present himself to the Garda National Immigration Bureau without any further delay.

However, as I previously informed the Deputy in my reply to his previous Parliamentary Question of 25 April 2013, if new information or circumstances have come to light, which have a direct bearing on the case of the person concerned and which has arisen since the original Deportation Order was made, there remains the option of the person concerned 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, as I previously stated, 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.

Passport Applications

223. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will set out the procedural requirements in order to qualify for an Irish passport in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 15; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41370/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act, 1956, as amended, provides that the Minister may, in his absolute discretion, grant an application for a certificate of naturalisation provided certain statutory conditions are fulfilled. They are, inter alia, that the applicant must

- be of full age
- be of good character
- have had a period of one year's continuous residency in the State immediately before the date of application and, during the eight years immediately preceding that period, have had a total residence in the State amounting to four years
- intend in good faith to continue to reside in the State after naturalisation.

The person concerned made an application for a certificate of naturalisation which was refused in 2011. The person concerned was informed of this and the reasons for it in a letter issued in May, 2011. It is open to the person in question to lodge a new application if and when she is in a position to meet the statutory conditions applicable at that time. In relation to the child of the person concerned, where sections 6A and 6B of the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended, are applicable, a child born in the island of Ireland on or after 1 January 2005 has an entitlement to Irish citizenship if, at the time of the birth of the child, one of his or her parents had, during the period of 4 years immediately preceding the person's birth, been resident in the island of Ireland for a period of not less than 3 years or periods the aggregate of which is not less than 3 years. Periods of unlawful residence, periods of residence which were for the sole purpose of having an application for refugee status determined or periods of residence where permission was granted for the purposes of study are excluded from the determination of periods of reckonable residence. Entitlement of a child to Irish citizenship is determined by the Passport Office following receipt of an application for a passport on the child's behalf.

Where a child born in the State did not at birth have an entitlement to Irish citizenship, the parent or guardian or person who is in loco parentis to the child may lodge an application for naturalisation on behalf of the child if and when the conditions for naturalisation are satisfied. 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.

Garda Investigations

224. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if there has been any investigation by Irish authorities regarding the dealings of a former prominent senior executive editor in Irish media circles (details supplied). [41402/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I am informed by the Garda authorities that An Garda Síochána has no record, or knowledge of any complaint or investigation arising from the BBC programme referred to.

Consultancy Contracts Expenditure

225. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the consultants, if any, he has contracted since 1 January 2013 to advise on the possible sale of any assets; the current situation; the advice given and the terms and cost of the contract; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41548/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I wish to inform the Deputy that in the period 1 January 2013 to date my Department has not contracted any consultants to advise on the possible sale of assets.

Consultancy Contracts Expenditure

226. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Defence the consultants, if any, he has contracted since 1 January 2013 to advise on the possible sale of any assets; the current situation; the advice given and the terms and cost of the contract; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41541/13]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): The Department has engaged Dominic Daly and Co. to oversee the sale, by public auction, of the decommissioned naval service vessel LE Emer. The costs involved will be determined by the selling price achieved at auction.

Animal Slaughtering Standards

227. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the Food Safety Authority of Ireland has undertaken research to determine the risk to public health from the use of animal antibiotics in livestock which are then rendered for human consumption; if he will outline the testing and enforcement process in this regard; if his attention has been drawn to any instances where unacceptable levels of antibiotics were detected in the food chain; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41241/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): I fully share current concerns about the growth in antibiotic resistance, which is recognised as a complex and multi-faceted issue requiring a broad and co-ordinated approach involving both the human and veterinary medicine spheres. The publication at the end of 2011 of the European Commission's Action Plan in relation to anti-microbial resistance represented a particularly significant milestone in the development of an EU wide strategy covering both human and veterinary medicines. My Department and associated agencies are participating in the development of specific measures to deliver on the 12 Actions set out in the Plan. My Department has already ensured that, in accordance with EU legislation, advertising of antibiotics to farmers is prohibited and that such medicines may only be used on the prescription of a veterinary practitioner in respect

of animals under his/her care.

My Department carries out extensive testing for antibiotic residues under the National Residue Plan, the results of which are published. For example, in 2012, almost 9,500 samples were tested for antibiotic residues, of which 0.1% contained residues in excess of authorised levels. The carcasses concerned had been detained in all cases and were prohibited from entering the food chain. A follow up inspection takes place in all cases at the farm of origin and appropriate action is taken including mandatory additional testing and, where appropriate, penalties are applied under the Single Farm Payment Regime. All residue positives, including those for antibiotics, are reported to the Food Safety Authority of Ireland under established protocols. The Authority, which is an independent scientific agency coming under the aegis of the Minister for Health, carries out a risk assessment to determine whether there are any issues for public health.

In terms of other actions in this important area, my Department's Central Veterinary Research Laboratory is designated as National Reference Laboratory (NRL) for Antimicrobial Resistance as part of the EU network of NRL's in implementing an EU wide harmonised AMR monitoring programme (annual reports are available on DAFM website (see laboratories/ zoonoses)).

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Payments

228. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a disadvantaged areas scheme payment will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41251/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Following initial processing of the application of the person named, an issue was identified in relation to one of the parcels declared; an official of my Department has been in direct contact with the person named in this regard. Immediately the person named confirms to my Department the actual position regarding the parcel in question, the application will be further processed, with a view to payment issuing shortly thereafter.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Payments

229. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding the 2012 headage payment in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41275/13]

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 to have had a minimum stocking density on their holding in 2011 of 0.3 livestock units per forage hectare. My Department wrote to all concerned applicants in August 2012 allowing them the opportunity to seek derogation from this requirement. However, to date, my Department has no record of receiving an application for derogation in this case. Therefore, as the holding of the person named did not meet the 2011 minimum stocking requirement and as the person named was not granted derogation from this requirement, no payment is due under the 2012 Scheme.

Consultancy Contracts Expenditure

230. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the

consultants, if any, he has contracted since 1 January 2013 to advise on the possible sale of any assets; the current situation; the advice given and the terms and cost of the contract; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41537/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Since 1 January 2013, my Department has not employed any consultants to advise on the possible sale of this Department's assets.

Child and Family Support Agency Expenditure

231. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will confirm that the new payroll system for the Child and Family Agency will be fully operational by 1 January 2014; the current status of this payroll system and the additional resources provided to ensure that it is fully operational by January 2014; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [41371/13]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Significant preparations are underway to develop the financial procedures and accounting arrangements that are required of a major public body such as the Child and Family Agency in discharging its financial accountability. In line with public service modernization it has been decided that shared services will be exploited to the fullest extent to promote operational efficiency. It has been agreed that the HSE will provide shared services to the Child and Family Agency including in respect of financial and human resource transactional processing. This includes delivery by HSE shared services of the Agency's payroll requirements. Children and Families are working closely with colleagues in the HSE Financial Shared Services to develop a new payroll system for implementation on the creation of the Agency. In this context, a specific plan and timetable has been adopted which is expected to deliver on this requirement.

Child Care Qualifications

232. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her views on a pre-budget submission by Early Childhood Ireland that a training transformation fund should be provided, which would support higher qualifications and continuing professional development; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [41405/13]

233. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her views on an Early Childhood Ireland proposal that a group of skilled mentors be available to work with clusters of child care services across the country (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [41406/13]

234. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will ensure that trainers or tutors who deliver child care or education training must have qualifications and experience relevant to the sector; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [41407/13]

235. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs on behalf of Early Childhood Ireland, if she will adopt a phased approach to the introduction of standards with training and support for the sector; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [41409/13]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take

Questions Nos. 232 to 235, inclusive, together.

I am committed, in conjunction with the HSE and other stakeholders, to progressing a Pre-School Quality Agenda involving a range of actions aimed at improving the quality within early years services and enhancing the regulatory regime. I have outlined to the Dáil on a number of occasions the areas which I believe need to be addressed as a matter of urgency and a number of reforms have already commenced.

Budget discussions in relation to funding priorities for next year are underway and a number of groups have made pre-budget submissions to my Department. While all proposals are welcomed and are given consideration by my officials, it is not the practice to engage in correspondence or discussions in relation to these proposals while the budgetary process is ongoing.

Child Care Services Provision

236. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs on behalf of Early Childhood Ireland if she will ensure data from the inspection report countrywide are located and analysed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [41410/13]

237. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs on behalf of Early Childhood Ireland, if she will develop blueprints with targets and timelines to link funding to quality and if she will make a statement on the matter. [41411/13]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 236 and 237 together.

I am committed, in conjunction with the HSE and other stakeholders, to progressing a Pre-School Quality Agenda involving a range of actions aimed at improving the quality within early years services and enhancing the regulatory regime. I have outlined to the Dáil on a number of occasions the areas which I believe need to be addressed as a matter of urgency and a number of reforms have already commenced.

Budget discussions in relation to funding priorities for next year are underway and a number of groups have made submissions to my Department, including Early Childhood Ireland, which are being taken into consideration in this context. However, it is not the practice to engage in correspondence or discussions on these proposals while the budgetary process is ongoing.

Child Care Services Inspections

238. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will include early childhood specialists within inspection teams to build an existing expertise within the sector; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [41412/13]

239. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs on behalf of Early Childhood Ireland, if she will ensure that services have the right to reply on all inspection reports; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [41413/13]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Under the Child Care (Pre-School Services) (No 2) Regulations 2006 as provided in the Child Care Act 1991, the Health Service Executive has responsibility for the inspection of services and the enforcement of the regulations. Inspection is carried out to monitor compliance with the Regulations thereby ensuring the health, safety and welfare of children and the promotion of their develop-

ment.

I understand that the HSE in May this year introduced national standard procedures which will afford childcare service providers the right to reply to their inspection reports. The process of publishing all reports on-line is underway which will allow open access to parents, providers and the general public to inspection findings.

We are working on developing a more robust, consistent and regular inspection system. There has been a significant programme of work underway in the HSE over the past year to develop a single, consistent national inspection service. Building on this work, officials of my Department and the Department of Education and Skills have been examining options to incrementally develop a more comprehensive and broader-based inspection regime for pre-schools; moving away from a narrow focus on compliance, and leading to a greater focus on children's outcomes, including educational development and child wellbeing.

The staff of the HSE's pre-school inspection service will transfer to the new Child and Family Agency which will be established shortly. New national management arrangements are being introduced to ensure consistency and the best use of resources. The configuration of the inspection teams will be considered as part of this process.

Consultancy Contracts Expenditure

240. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the consultants, if any, she has contracted since 1 January 2013 to advise on the possible sale of any assets; the current situation; the advice given and the terms and cost of the contract; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [41539/13]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I wish to inform the Deputy that my Department has not contracted consultants, since 1 January 2013, to advise on the possible sale of any assets.

Haddington Road Agreement Issues

241. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the reason sections 38 and 39 funded voluntary organisations were included in the savings required by the Haddington Road agreement and the impact this will have on the provision of services. [41249/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The Haddington Road Agreement (HRA) is a critical enabler for employers and organisations, across the full spectrum of the public health sector, to make their contribution to the cost reductions required by Government and to support the public service reform agenda. All agencies funded by the HSE, including Section 39 agencies, are required to make an appropriate and proportionate contribution to the implementation of payroll and related cost reduction measures, in line with other publicly funded bodies. The cost reductions applied across the health service are designed to protect existing levels of services and to provide a more sustainable payroll cost base into the future.

Employees of bodies funded under Section 38 of the Health Act 2004, as public servants, are party to the HRA. While employees in bodies funded under Section 39 of the Health Act 2004 are not public servants, and therefore not party to the HRA, the HSE is in communication with the Section 39 bodies to ensure that the savings and flexibility measures which derive from the Agreement, are pursued across the Section 39 sector.

Special Educational Needs Staffing

242. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health his views on correspon-

dence on behalf of Early Childhood Ireland (details supplied) seeking that special needs assistants be provided to pre-schools to ensure that every child can access a free preschool place in the year before entering primary school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41408/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The Government is fully committed to protecting frontline services, including services for children with disabilities, to the greatest extent possible, notwithstanding the financial constraints which the health sector must operate within. Significant resources have been invested by the health sector in recent years in services for children with disabilities. In particular, there is now an increased awareness of the importance of early intervention for these children in terms of ensuring they get the best start in life and are supported as much as possible to reach their full potential.

As the Deputy will be aware, the Health Service Executive has operational responsibility for the provision of health and personal social services, including disability services for children. Within this context and subject to the financial resources available, it has a responsibility to ensure that the health-related needs of children with disabilities are addressed and that these children are appropriately supported in pre-school and school settings. This is done in a number of ways such as by providing grant-aid to support pre-school provision in community pre-schools and by funding special pre-schools that cater specifically for children with disabilities. It has also facilitated children with disabilities to attend mainstream pre-schools by providing assistant supports where these supports may be necessary. The HSE's role in supporting children with disabilities involves it working in close co-operation with the disability service providers that it funds, with the education sector, with the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and with the parents and families of the children in question. The HSE's reorganisation of existing therapy resources to geographic based teams for children and young people with disabilities under the Progressing Disabilities Programme for Children and Young People (0-18) is also significant in this context. This aims to increase the level of consistency and standardisation in the way both early intervention services and services for school-aged children with disabilities are delivered and to have one clear pathway for all children with disabilities according to need.

While the health, children and youth affairs and education sectors co-operate on a regular basis with a view to integrating their services for children with a disability as much as possible there is a need to strengthen these arrangements. The Children, Adolescents and Young People with Complex Disabilities Unit led by a Principal Officer has been established in my Department. This important development aims to foster greater collaboration between my Department, the Department of Education and Skills and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs on children's disability issues and to build on the cross-sectoral working arrangements that are already in place. A dedicated Cross-Sectoral Team, comprising representatives of my Department, the HSE, the Department of Education and Skills and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs plays a key role in this regard.

A sub group of this Cross-Sectoral Team has been set up to examine the issues around the integration of children with disabilities into mainstream Pre-School Settings, building on previous analysis in this area. Representatives of the Departments of Health, Children and Youth Affairs, Education and Skills, the Health Service Executive and of the City and County Child-care Committees are members of this group and it is chaired by the Department of Health. It is envisaged that the work of this Sub-Group will be completed later this year, at which point it will report to the Cross Sectoral Team.

Nursing Home Services

243. **Deputy Joe Higgins** asked the Minister for Health the practical and financial assis-

tance that will be given to residents of a home (details supplied) in County Dublin in finding alternative accommodation following announcement that the home will close in the next three to five years following budget cuts [41234/13]

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 attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Medical Card Applications

244. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Health when a medical card will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Carlow; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41237/13]

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. The Health Service Executive operates the General Medical Services scheme, which includes medical cards and GP visit cards, under the Health Act 1970, as amended. It has established a dedicated contact service for members of the Oireachtas specifically for queries relating to medical cards and GP visit cards, which the Deputy may wish to use for an earlier response. Contact information has issued to Oireachtas members.

Medical Card Eligibility

245. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for Health the reasons persons who have life threatening serious illnesses are not granted a medical card for life (details supplied). [41239/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): Under the provisions of the Health Act 1970, the assessment for a medical card is determined primarily by reference to the means, including the income and expenditure, of the applicant and his or her partner and dependants. While people with specific illnesses are not automatically entitled to medical cards, the legislation provides for discretion by the HSE to grant a medical card where a person's income exceeds the income guidelines. In these cases, social and medical issues are considered when determining whether or not undue hardship exists for the individual in accessing GP or other medical services. Discretion will be applied automatically during the processing of an application where additional information has been provided which can be considered with discretion by staff or a medical officer, where appropriate. At Minister Reilly's request, the HSE set up a clinical panel to assist in the processing of applications for discretionary medical cards, where a person exceeds the income guidelines but there are difficult personal circumstances, such as an illness.

The HSE also has a system in place in relation to the provision of emergency medical cards for patients who are terminally ill, or who are seriously ill and in urgent need of medical care that they cannot afford. Emergency medical cards are issued within 24 hours of receipt of the required patient details and letter of confirmation of condition from a doctor or consultant and are generally requested by a manager in a Local Health Office or a Social Worker.

With the exception of terminally ill patients in palliative care, all emergency cards are issued for six months on the basis that the patient is eligible for a medical card on the basis of means or undue hardship, and will follow up with a full application within a number of weeks of receiving the emergency card. Where a patient is terminally ill in palliative care, the nature of the terminal illness is not a deciding factor in the issue of an emergency medical card in these circumstances and no means test applies.

Given the nature and urgency of the issue, the HSE has appropriate escalation routes to ensure that the person gets the card as quickly as possible and the HSE ensures that the system responds to the variety of circumstances and complexities faced by individuals in these circumstances. The HSE has been asked to examine this individual matter raised by the Deputy and to respond as soon as possible.

Health Services Reform

246. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if a full assessment has been carried out on the possible impact on the health services as a result of the FEMPI measures being implemented, if he will detail same and the actions being taken to counteract increased pressure on services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41240/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): A review was carried out earlier this year under the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (FEMPI) Act 2009 in relation to the operation, effectiveness and impact of the amounts and rates payable to certain health professionals under the relevant Regulations. The professionals concerned were General Practitioners, Pharmacists, Dentists, Ophthalmologists, Optometrists and Dispensing Opticians who hold contracts with the HSE, Smeartakers contracted under the CervicalCheck programme and Consultant Psychiatrists who hold contracts with the Mental Health Commission.

Having carefully considered the submissions made during the consultation process, the Minister for Health decided to make the following reductions: an overall reduction of 7.5% in fees and allowances payable to GPs under the GMS Scheme, Immunisation Schemes, Heart-Watch and the Maternity & Infant Care Scheme; the elimination of the 20% retail mark-up to Community Pharmacists in respect of items dispensed under the Drug Payment Scheme, the Long Term Illness Scheme, the European Economic Area Scheme and the Health (Amendment) Act 1996 Scheme; a 3% reduction in fees paid to Consultant Ophthalmologists; a 3% reduction in fees paid to Consultant Psychiatrists who hold contracts with the Mental Health Commission.

The following Regulations have been prepared to give effect to the Minister's decisions and these came into effect on 24 July 2013: S.I. 277/2013 - Health Professionals (Reduction of Payments to General Practitioners) Regulations 2013; S.I. 278/2013 - Health Professionals (Reduction of Payments to General Practitioners) (National Immunisation Programmes) Regulations 2013; S.I. 279/2013 - Health Professionals (Reduction of Payments to Community Pharmacy Contractors) Regulations 2013; S.I. 274/2013 - Health Professionals (Reduction in payments to Ophthalmologists, Optometrists and Dispensing Opticians) Regulations 2013; S.I. 276/2013 - Health Professionals (Reduction of Payments to Consultant Psychiatrists) Regulations 2013.

Under the FEMPI legislation, the Minister for Health is required to carry out a review of the operation, effectiveness and impact of the amounts and rates fixed under the regulations each year. This will involve a full consultation with stakeholders in 2014.

General Medical Services Scheme Payments

247. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health if health expenses will be reimbursed to a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41263/13]

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. The Health Service Executive operates the General Medical Services scheme, which includes

medical cards and GP visit cards, under the Health Act 1970, as amended. It has established a dedicated contact service for members of the Oireachtas specifically for queries relating to medical cards and GP visit cards, which the Deputy may wish to use for an earlier response. Contact information has issued to Oireachtas members.

National Treatment Purchase Fund Waiting Times

248. **Deputy Ciara Conway** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding orthopaedic surgery cancellations (details supplied); the reason that the budget for the National Treatment Purchase Fund running low was not foreseen and pre-op procedures avoided; if he will indicate when these patients will have their operations rescheduled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41268/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): In July 2011 I announced changes to the remit of the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF), namely that its role would be changed to support the mission of the Special Delivery Unit (SDU). The NTPF/SDU are working closely with hospitals towards achievement of maximum waiting time targets.

I am advised that, as part of this work in 2012, funding was set aside from the 2012 NTPF allocation to support Waterford Regional Hospital in arranging initial consultations for a limited number of orthopaedic outpatients with the cooperation of Cappagh Hospital in Dublin. In doing so, it is never possible to predict with certainty, in advance of consultations taking place, whether all those outpatients will require further medical help, or to predict the cohort of patients who will require follow-on inpatient surgical intervention. In 2013, unlike previous years, any funding for such performance improvement initiatives is held within the HSE Vote. Hence, the hospitals involved agreed to an orderly transition of the initiative (that had already been commenced) in a manner that minimised any disruption to the patients involved and made best use of the patient appointments already held, while working within a budget now provided directly to public hospitals.

Hence, of the 1,871 patient referrals from Waterford Regional Hospital to Cappagh Hospital, 1,623 patients had their treatment completed at Cappagh while the remaining 248 will now have their treatment provided by Waterford Regional Hospital. I am advised that those patients who had been scheduled for either an outpatient appointment or a procedure at Cappagh Hospital, all are being rescheduled for appointments and treatment at Waterford Regional Hospital and the hospital is currently writing to these patients advising them that their care needs will be seen to as expeditiously as possible.

Ambulance Service Provision

249. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Health in view of the fact that the Health Information and Quality Authority does not receive or publish key performance indicators on a regional basis regarding the delivery of the ambulance service, and this means that the management of the service cannot see or respond to regional variances in service provision, if he will instruct HIQA to collect and publish these KPIs. [41272/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) published the Pre-hospital Emergency Care Key Performance Indicators for Emergency Response Time in October 2012. They developed a set of key performance indicators (KPIs), which classify 112/999 emergency calls by clinical status. Clinical Status 1 ECHO calls involve life-threatening emergencies of cardiac or respiratory origin. Clinical Status 1 DELTA calls involve life-threatening emergencies of other than cardiac or respiratory origin. The

HIQA target for patient-carrying vehicles is to meet the Clinical Status 1 ECHO and DELTA incident response time of 18 minutes 59 seconds in 85% of cases.

It is acknowledged that response-time indicators should not be used in isolation as a means of evaluating of pre-hospital emergency service delivery. Following a review of the validity of time-based KPIs for clinical status data, and in line with international views, it is considered that clinical outcome indicators would be more appropriate. For example, there may be significant regional variations in response times because of the influence of differing geographic and demographic factors in different areas, while outcomes may be similar. Work is now in progress on the development of clinical outcome indicators for pre-hospital emergency responses.

In relation to the Deputy's query, the HSE publishes monthly performance data, including performance information for pre-hospital emergency response times at national level. This information is collected from data reported at regional level within the National Ambulance Service and is available to management for information and decision-making in relation to local service provision.

Hospital Services

250. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health if he will confirm the commitment given by the Health Service Executive at the meeting of the Dublin North East Health Forum on 23 September 2013 that the chronic and acute pain management clinic will be reinstated and included in the service plan and budget for 2014 at Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda, County Louth, and that an acute and chronic pain management consultant will be appointed to manage same in 2014 at Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital in Drogheda. [41276/13]

251. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health if he will request the Health Service Executive to specify acute and chronic pain management consultant in the job description when advertising for position of anaesthetic staff for Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital in Drogheda, County Louth, in order to reinstate the acute and chronic pain management clinic following the commitment given by the HSE to include said clinic in the service plan and budget for 2014 at Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital in Drogheda. [41277/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 250 and 251 together.

A Chronic Pain Service was developed in Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital in Drogheda during 2012. This Service was not part of the Service Plan for the Louth Meath Hospital Group, but rather an adjunct service provided by a Consultant Anaesthetist who had the appropriate skills and a particular interest in the provision of such a service. The service ran from February 2012 to December 2012 and ceased when the Consultant left the employment of the hospital. The HSE has been unsuccessful in recruiting a clinician with the same expertise and it is not therefore possible to provide this service at this time. Further recruitment of Anaesthetic staff is planned in November 2013 and endeavours will be made to secure this expertise in that context.

As discussed at the meeting of the Dublin North East Health Forum on 23rd September 2013, the provision of all services, including specialist clinics for the management of acute and chronic pain, must be considered in the context of the development of the HSE National Service Plan. The Deputy will also recall from my response to his previous Parliamentary Question on this matter that the reorganisation of public hospitals into groups will allow hospitals to work together, in concert with their primary and community care colleagues, to provide high quality, safe and appropriate services which address the evidence-based needs of their populations across the whole Group, using the services and resources of all of the hospitals in the Group.

Nursing Home Accommodation

252. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health if he will give a commitment to include the €9 million in budget 2014 following on from the commitment given to provide a new 100-bed unit at St. Mary's-Boyne View Nursing Home in Drogheda to cater for residential care for our elderly citizens, in view of the removal of long-stay beds and respite beds from the Cottage Hospital in Drogheda. [41278/13]

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.

Health Services Staff Data

253. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide details of the number of specialist palliative care home care nurses nationally, whole time equivalents, and in each Health Service Executive region; the areas where there are deficits and vacancies in the numbers of such nurses measured against national policy and the size of the deficit in each case; his plans to address such deficits; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41280/13]

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

Medical Card Appeals

254. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for Health the actions being taken to address the backlog in the medical card appeals office; the actions being taken to speed up the length of time it takes the appeals office to inform persons of the appeal allowing them to reactivate a person's medical card for the duration of the appeal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41281/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): The length of time it currently takes for medical card appeals to be processed may vary depending on the complexity of the appeal and this can average between 4 to 12 weeks. It is important to point out that many of these appeals cases are reviews of existing medical card holders and in that instance there is no immediate impact on the client as they continue to hold the medical card until the appeal decision is made. There is no significant delay on the part of the Appeals Service in advising PCRS of appeals received.

Hospital Procedures

255. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the number of hip replacement operations that have been carried out in the past three to nine months on public patients at Letterkenny General Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41287/13]

256. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the number of hip replacement operations that have been carried out in the past three to nine months on private patients at Letterkenny General Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41288/13]

257. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the number of public patients currently waiting for joint replacements and the length of time waiting at Letterkenny General

Hospital [41289/13]

258. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide information on the allocation of theatre time to carry out joint replacements on public patients at Letterkenny General Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41290/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 255 to 258, inclusive, together.

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, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

In relation to the particular queries raised by the Deputy, I have asked the Health Service Executive to investigate the situation and respond directly to the Deputy in this matter.

Respite Care Services

259. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health if an extra six hours of respite care will be approved in the case of a person (details supplied); if he will expedite the matter [41293/13]

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 attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Appointment Status

260. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a hospital appointment will become available in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41315/13]

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.

Cochlear Implants

261. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health his plans to introduce a bilateral cochlear implant programme in 2014 [41326/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): Beaumont Hospital is the centre for delivering Ireland's national cochlear implant programme, with surgical provision for patients under six years being carried out in the Children's University Hospital Temple Street. Since the programme commenced in 1995, over 700 patients have received cochlear implants. Beaumont

Hospital carried out ninety cochlear implants in 2012 (42 children and 48 adults).

The HSE has developed a proposal, in liaison with Beaumont Hospital, to introduce a bilateral cochlear implant programme in Ireland. It is planned that the programme will be located in Beaumont Hospital. This is a complex development and the HSE has engaged with many stakeholders in the proposal development. Introduction of bilateral cochlear implantation will involve additional staff, equipment and capital works and will be dependent on additional funding being made available to support its commencement. The proposal is being considered as part of the 2014 Estimates process.

Primary Care Centres Provision

262. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the primary care centre projects announced on 17 July 2012; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41327/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): The delivery of primary care infrastructure is a dynamic process and must take account of changing circumstances including the feasibility of implementing the delivery of the centres by means of lease, direct-build or PPP. The Health Service Executive (HSE) is working with the National Development Finance Agency (NDFA) to progress Primary Care Centre Public Private Partnership. The HSE has appointed design teams and technical advisors for the project. The HSE & NDFA have completed an indicative Public Sector Benchmark (PSB) which was presented to the Project Board for consideration of affordability in early September.

The NDFA as a centre of expertise will be responsible for the delivery of the Primary Care PPP programme on behalf of the HSE, including the management of the procurement phase and the provision of financial advice including a Value for Money assessment. It has been reviewing the processes involved in procurement of PPP projects with a view to streamlining the process and delivering projects more quickly. 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.

Services for People with Disabilities

263. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health his views the implications of the funding cut to St. Michael's House, as outlined by its directors, including the reduction in staffing across the organisation in day services, clinical services and administration, contraction of residential and respite services, closure of residential services for one Sunday each month, cessation of rent subsidy, cessation of the trainee allowance, reductions in transport, no new residential places or long-term respite and reduced day service for school and training centre leavers; if he has met the directors and the relevant Health Service Executive officials to discuss the matter; and if he will make special budgetary provision or take other steps to avert the crisis. [41336/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): St. Michael's House received over €70 million in 2012 in funding from the HSE to provide a range of services to approximately 1,660 children and adults with an intellectual disability in over 170 centres in the Greater Dublin Area and Navan Co. Meath.

The HSE and St. Michael's House work in close collaboration with regard to the funding and delivery of services to people with an intellectual disability. As a voluntary agency, St. Michael's house are obliged to work within the resources available to them and in that regard

have introduced significant efficiencies over recent years to remain within budget. The HSE has advised that these changes to date have not resulted in service contraction.

The Haddington Road Agreement (HRA) sets out measures relating to productivity, cost extraction and reform which together intends to achieve a required pay bill reduction of €150m identified in the HSE Service Plan 2013. The agreement provides a framework and opportunities for managers within the health services, including agencies such as St. Michael's House, to reduce their costs associated with agency and overtime and a wide range of other pay costs, particularly through measures such as additional working hours and revised rates in respect of overtime.

The HSE has advised the Department of Health that the recent application of additional budget cuts under the HRA has presented a significant challenge to St. Michael's House. A process is now underway between the HSE and St. Michael's House to identify the impact of these budget reductions on services. In this respect, I understand that the following are under discussion:

- St. Michael's House proposal of Sunday closing and revised transport arrangements are under consideration in consultation with those families who may be in a position to accommodate this.
- the HSE are unaware of any issues concerning respite.
- appropriate staffing levels and skill mix are under consideration in line with HRA.
- patient charges are being reviewed by St. Michael's House in line with national regulations.

The HSE are working with St. Michael's House and other service providers to fully address the needs of school leavers in 2013 by reconfiguring existing resources.

The Department of Health has received assurances from the HSE that both organisations are committed to working within the terms of the HRA to ensure that services are impacted upon only as a measure of last resort.

National Lottery Funding Applications

264. **Deputy Michael McCarthy** asked the Minister for Health if his Department has received an application for a national lottery grant from an organisation (details supplied) in County Cork; and when a decision will be made in respect of this application. [41337/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): My Department has received an application for funding from the 2013 National Lottery allocation from the organisation in question. This is one of a large number currently being assessed by my Department, and the Deputy will be informed of the outcome of the application as soon as a decision has been made.

Home Help Service Provision

265. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health if he will investigate the case of a person (details supplied) in County Dublin; and if he will consider launching an inquiry into the way the home help service is being run by Rehab Group. [41396/13]

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 attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Medical Card Appeals

266. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding a medical card appeal in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Limerick; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41397/13]

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. The Health Service Executive operates the General Medical Services scheme, which includes medical cards and GP visit cards, under the Health Act 1970, as amended. It has established a dedicated contact service for members of the Oireachtas specifically for queries relating to medical cards and GP visit cards, which the Deputy may wish to use for an earlier response. Contact information has issued to Oireachtas members.

Hospital Services

267. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding an operation in respect of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 5. [41523/13]

268. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if medical records will be provided in respect of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 5 [41524/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 267 and 268 together.

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.

As the Deputy is aware the issue of the release of medical records is a matter for the hospital concerned. However, if a patient or a relative has a concern or wishes to make a complaint, they should contact the Medical Records Office. If the issue cannot be resolved to the patient's or relative's satisfaction, they will be connected with the Patient Representative's Office, which can offer information and support and can investigate and help to resolve the matter. Alternatively, the complaint may be made directly to the HSE via the "your service your say" form. When an individual is not satisfied with the response they receive, they may wish to take their complaint further by seeking a review from the HSE's Director of Advocacy or the Office of the Ombudsman.

In relation to the specific queries raised by the Deputy, as these are service matters they have been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Disability Support Services Issues

269. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the reduction in funding to disability services (details supplied) in County Wicklow; if his attention

has been drawn to the impact this is having on the provisions of services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41528/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services, including disability services. The HSE either directly provides or contracts disability agencies such as Sunbeam House Services to provide a range of disability services through service level arrangements.

The HSE and Sunbeam House Services work in close collaboration with regard to the funding and delivery of services to people with an intellectual disability. As a voluntary agency, Sunbeam House Services are obliged to work within the resources available to them and in that regard have introduced significant efficiencies over recent years to remain within budget. Sunbeam House Services has confirmed that there have been no other cuts in services across any of the current day, residential or respite services.

The Haddington Road Agreement (HRA) sets out measures relating to productivity, cost extraction and reform which together intends to achieve a required pay bill reduction of €150m identified in the HSE Service Plan 2013. The agreement provides a framework and opportunities for managers within the health services, including agencies such as Sunbeam House Services, to reduce their costs associated with agency and overtime and a wide range of other pay costs, particularly through measures such as additional working hours and revised rates in respect of overtime.

The HSE is engaged in ongoing consultation with Sunbeam House Services and monitoring meetings take place on a regular basis. The HSE is aware of the significant challenges in the years ahead and will endeavour to ensure that all of the resources available for specialist disability services are used in the most efficient and effective manner possible.

In relation to the specific queries raised by the Deputy, as these are service issues they have been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Services for People with Disabilities

270. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Health if he will ensure that the funding provided for disability services in budget 2014 will be ring fenced and protected at 2013 levels; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41529/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The level of funding available for the health budget and the extent of the savings required in the health sector are being considered as part of the estimates and budgetary process for 2014 which is currently underway. Pending completion of the national estimates, budgetary and service planning process for 2014 it is not possible to predict the service levels to be provided next year for the disability sector.

Hospitals Funding

271. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health if it is now the case that the expected savings in 2014 from the measures contained in the Health (Amendment) Act 2013 in relation to the increased charges for private patients in public hospitals is €30 million and the full year effect €45 million instead of the €120 million originally outlined during the Health (Amendment) Bill 2013 debate in Dáil Éireann; for the reason for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41532/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The Health (Amendment) Act, 2013 (No. 31 of 2013) provides for the introduction of a single private in-patient charge for all private patients, including those accommodated in public beds. The charges set out in the Act have been set at a level intended to raise an additional €30 million in hospital revenue in 2014. As I outlined when the Act was being debated in the Dáil, as a result of discussions between my Department and the private insurance industry during the Act's passage through the Oireachtas, in order to agree a phasing-in of the charges for all private in-patients, including those who occupy public beds, I decided to implement the charges from 1 January 2014 at a rate calculated to raise an additional €30 million in 2014.

Hospitals Funding

272. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health the savings that would be realised if measures were introduced which saved 3% of the total hospital budget; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41533/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): 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.

Consultancy Contracts Expenditure

273. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Health the consultants, if any, he has contracted since 1 January 2013 to advise on the possible sale of any assets; the current situation; the advice given and the terms and cost of the contract; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41546/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): I have not contracted any consultants since 1 January 2013 to advise on the possible sale of any assets.

Sports Funding

274. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on a pre-budget submission on behalf of Irish Sport that €1 per person in addition to the funding be channelled into a specific fund to be used exclusively to create employment and fund participation programmes; the €3 million being directed to job creation with the remaining €1.5 million being used to fund relevant and targeted programmes to get more people physically active; it is estimated that a minimum €1.5 million of this overall investment will go back to the Revenue through PRSI, PAYE, USC, BAT; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41308/13]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I am aware of the proposals presented by the Federation of Irish Sport in their pre-budget submission on behalf of Irish sport. Government investment in sport supports a large number of jobs around the country and any proposals regarding further job creation are to be welcomed. The Deputy will be aware that decisions regarding funding for sport will be determined as part of the ongoing Budget 2014 process.

Alcohol Advertising

275. **Deputy Patrick Nulty** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has

met the alcohol industry or individual alcohol producing companies with regard to prohibiting sponsorship of sporting or cultural events since taking office; and if so, the number of meetings that have taken place and with whom. [41325/13]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Deputy will be aware that the proposals with regard to prohibiting sponsorship of sporting events were presented by the Minister of State at the Department of Health, Alex White. Following on from the proposals made by the Minister of State I have had one meeting with drinks industry groups and have had no meetings with any individual alcohol producing company. On the 17 of January 2013, I met with the Alcohol Beverage Federation of Ireland (ABFI) at their request. I also met with Alcohol Action Ireland, the organisation for alcohol-related issues, on 25 July 2013 at their request. In addition I have had several engagements with sporting bodies and the arts and culture festival sectors who have expressed their concerns about an end to sponsorship and impact it could have on sports, arts and culture. In addition, my colleague, the Minister of State for Tourism and Sport, Michael Ring also met with one organisation, MEAS (Mature Enjoyment of Alcohol in Society) at their request on 8 November 2012 in relation to their work.

Road Projects Status

276. **Deputy Dominic Hannigan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding the Slane bypass; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41376/13]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects is a matter for the National Roads Authority (NRA) under the Roads Acts 1993 to 2007 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. Within its capital budget, the assessment and prioritisation of individual projects is a matter in the first instance for the NRA in accordance with Section 19 of the Roads Act. Noting the above position, I have referred the Deputy's question to the NRA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.