

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 12, inclusive, answered orally.

Public Sector Staff Remuneration

13. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will provide in tabular form a breakdown of the number of public sector employees within the annual gross salary bands (details supplied). [42518/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The closest data currently available within the Department to that sought by the Deputy indicating the estimated breakdown of employee numbers on a whole time equivalent basis (based on a whole time equivalent figure of 290,000) by salary range within the public service post 1 July 2013 is set out in Table 1 below. The estimate takes account of the reductions in pay arising from the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (No. 2) Act, 2009, and the Financial Emergency Measures Act 2013, but does not take account of the impact of the Pension Related Deduction (PRD) or any offsetting reductions in taxes and levies.

€	WTE*
0 - 30,000	43,200
30,000 to 40,000	74,600
40,000 to 50,000	74,500
50,000 to 60,000	44,200
60,000 to 70,000	28,100
70,000 to 80,000	14,000
80,000 to 90,000	4,600
90,000 to 100,000	1,800
100,000 to 125,000	1,700
125,000 to 150,000	1,200
Over 150,000	2,100
TOTAL	290,000

*Rounded to nearest 100

Semi-State Bodies Remuneration

14. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans

to allow commercial semi-State companies to resume paying bonuses to executives; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42507/13]

48. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the ban on chief executive officers of commercial semi-State companies receiving bonuses will remain in place next year. [42295/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 14 and 48 together.

In 2012 the Government reviewed the position on the payment of performance related reward schemes or bonuses for Chief Executive Officers in Commercial State Companies and agreed to continue with the policy which it introduced in 2011 of requesting the State Companies concerned not to award such bonus payments in light of the serious state of the public finances. Furthermore the Government agreed to continue with the practice of excluding the payment of bonus provisions in the employment contracts of newly appointed CEOs to such State Companies as well as in respect of contract renewals for incumbent CEOs.

The requirement to cease such forms of bonus payment together with other basic salary reductions introduced by this Government in respect of the CEOs in State Companies was necessitated by the very difficult financial and economic circumstances facing this country. The Government will accordingly continue to consider future policy developments in relation to bonus payments for the CEOs concerned in the light of prevailing circumstances.

Oireachtas Banking Inquiry

15. **Deputy John Browne** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his views on whether an Oireachtas inquiry into the banking collapse represents the most effective way of uncovering all the relevant information in a timely manner; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42476/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The initiation of a banking inquiry is a matter for the Houses of the Oireachtas to determine. Under the Houses of the Oireachtas (Inquiries, Privileges and Procedures) Act 2013, authority rests with the Houses of the Oireachtas in determining the requirement for a formal inquiry, the terms of reference of an inquiry, the appropriate committee to conduct an inquiry and the procedural and organisational aspects of an inquiry. This Act provides a statutory framework to assist the Houses of the Oireachtas in conducting inquiries into matters of public importance in an effective and efficient manner within current constitutional parameters. Detailed arrangements and procedures to be followed are to be laid down in Rules and Standing Orders.

Performance Management and Development System

16. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will report on the progress of the implementation of phase two changes to the performance management and development system that are currently under way; the take-up of additional skills training courses across Departments as a result of PMDS reviews; and his views on overall progress in renewing the PMDS system. [42508/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): As the Deputy

is aware, my Department is engaged in the ongoing review and reform of the Performance Management and Development System (PMDS) in the Civil Service with enhancements to be introduced on a phased basis in the context of the broader objective to develop and strengthen the management culture across the Civil Service. In light of these objectives my Department's strategy is to:

- improve the design of PMDS and streamline the PMDS process; and
- work with management across the Civil Service to strengthen the operation of PMDS.

The PMDS process will be significantly streamlined by the introduction of an electronic PMDS system - ePMDS - to make the completion of PMDS forms possible online. My Department is working to develop this system at present so that, in January 2014, it will "go live" for those Departments that have moved to PeoplePoint - the new HR Shared Service Centre for the Civil Service.

The Phase 2 changes, agreed in July 2012 by my Department, together with management of the Civil Service and the unions, are being introduced for the current 2013 cycle. These changes seek to address issues concerning the perceived lack of fairness and consistency in the application of PMDS. The most important of the changes in Phase 2 is the introduction of a formal system of calibration for the review of performance. The process involves managers at the same grade-level meeting to discuss the performance of their jobholders with the aim of making sure that they apply similar standards for all jobholders and it should help to ensure greater balance and consistency in the award of ratings.

My Department has also implemented other changes to the system aimed at improving fairness and consistency, including:

- A new grade-based Competency Framework has been introduced, together with a revised rating scale with improved descriptions of performance levels.

- A more comprehensive process of internal review of ratings, and access to external review, are under way. The revised review procedures are being actively advanced with a view to early discussions with management and unions in the Civil Service so that these too will be in place for the final stages of the 2013 cycle.

- Finally, a rating of "Fully Achieved Expectations" is required for the award of an increment.

Turning to the take-up of additional training courses across Departments as a result of PMDS reviews, this is a matter for each individual Department and Office on the basis of its own assessment of training and development needs. My Department expects to have more detailed and comprehensive information available on take-up of training and development opportunities in the context of Learning and Development Shared Services Project which is currently under way.

Progress is being made in renewing PMDS. In 2012, compliance with PMDS rose to 85% - the highest level to date - up from 77% in 2011. My Department will continue to work with all managers across the system to continue to ensure full compliance with PMDS as part of an overall focus on strengthening managerial performance. A particular focus of attention for 2013 is the distribution of ratings with the aim of achieving a distribution of ratings that more accurately reflects performance across the system. Although there has been some movement towards greater alignment with the expected statistical distribution, there remains relatively high levels of awards of the higher categories of ratings overall and very low levels of ratings in respect of underperformance.

A key challenge for senior leadership across the Civil Service is to demonstrate their own commitment to delivering a high performance culture and to fully engage line managers in the management and improvement of performance. My Department will continue to review how we manage performance in the Civil Service and on the basis of this we will continue to make changes aimed at improving PMDS as it is the primary tool for managing performance in the Civil Service. My Department is committed to the ongoing strengthening of performance management to enable people to achieve their potential.

State Bodies Numbers

17. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the level of rationalisation of State bodies undertaken since the Government came into office to date. [42294/13]

22. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the position regarding the reduction in the number of State boards and agencies; the savings that will be achieved from this in 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42486/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 17 and 22 together.

As the Deputies are aware, the rationalisation of State bodies is a key deliverable of the Public Service Reform Plan. My Department is currently monitoring the implementation of the measures on a quarterly basis. The latest tables which detail this progress to end Quarter 3 2013 can be found on my Department's website. In summary, the tables show that significant progress has been made by Departments on implementation. To date, rationalisation and amalgamation measures involving 44 bodies have been fully implemented, most recently the abolition of the VECs, which were replaced by a much smaller number of Education and Training Boards. Measures involving a further 63 bodies are at advanced legislative or administrative stages.

Further measures, involving 109 bodies, were identified under a critical review process undertaken in 2012 as part of the Public Service Reform Plan and are currently being implemented. The Public Service Reform Plan aims to secure €20 million in enhanced service efficiencies and value-for-money from the rationalisation programme, a target that will be achieved. The bulk of the savings are derived from a reduction in the number of public servants working in the merged entities and from other administrative efficiencies.

From the outset I have maintained that the lasting and most important benefit from the rationalisation of State Bodies will be a less crowded administrative landscape, resulting in greater democratic accountability, less duplication of effort and clearer lines of responsibility for the citizen. Moreover, the rationalisation programme needs to be understood as just one of a package of reform measures that will allow for the continued delivery of critical services against the backdrop of reducing public service numbers. There will of course be other cash savings realised over time as organisations, financial systems, office accommodation etc. are rationalised into leaner, more coherent structures. These savings, some of which will be once-off, will be factored into the overall budgetary framework as they arise.

Within my own area of control the Commission on Public Service Appointments was merged into the Office of the Ombudsman with effect from October 2012. Arrangements are also currently underway for the merger of the Valuation Office, the Property Registration Authority and Ordnance Survey Ireland; and the measure concerning the State Laboratory and the Forensic Science Laboratory is progressing.

Public Sector Pensions Issues

18. **Deputy Seamus Kirk** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to review the cost of lump sum payments to senior public servants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42490/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): Retirement lump sums are payable to Public Servants in accordance with the terms of relevant legislation and Superannuation Schemes. Lump sum benefits on retirement were introduced in the Civil Service in 1909 with a commensurate reduction in the accrual rate for actual pension from 60ths to 80ths - most pension schemes in the Public Service now provide benefits on the same basis.

It is to be noted that the substantial pay reductions applied to date under the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (FEMPI) Acts have the effect of reducing the cost of retirement lump sums throughout the Public Service. It should also be noted that retirement lump sums in excess of €200,000 are subject to tax on the excess amount while the Standard Fund Threshold for an individual's overall pension benefits is now €2.3 million, reduced from the previous level of €5.4 million.

The Public Service Pensions (Single Scheme and Other Provisions) Act 2012 introduced a new Single Public Service Pension Scheme which commenced on 1 January of this year. The Single Scheme provides that new entrant Public Servants appointed on or after that date, including Members of the Oireachtas, will be members of the Scheme and will have their pension benefits based on career average earnings as opposed to the current final salary basis. The Scheme also provides for a new minimum pension age of 66, rising to age 67 in 2021 and age 68 in 2028 in line with changes to the age at which the State Pension (Contributory) will become payable. These changes will lead to a substantial reduction in the cost of overall superannuation benefits, including lump sum payments, in the Public Service into the future.

I assure the Deputy that Public Service pay and pension costs will be kept under review as part of the Government's ongoing strategy to bring the public finances to a sustainable level.

Open Government Partnership

19. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the date on which Ireland will join the Open Government Partnership. [42522/13]

44. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when it is intended that Ireland will join the Open Government Partnership. [42519/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 19 and 44 together.

Following Government approval, I submitted a letter of intent for Ireland to participate in the Open Government Partnership (OGP) on 15 May 2013 and Ireland therefore joined the 4th cohort of new countries who will formulate an Open Government Partnership national action plan. The OGP is a global multilateral initiative that aims to secure concrete commitments from governments to promote transparency, empower citizens, fight corruption, and harness new technologies to strengthen governance. It is overseen by a multi-stakeholder International Steering Committee consisting of Brazil, Indonesia, Mexico, Norway, the Philippines, South Africa, Tanzania, the United Kingdom and the United States, as well as civil society representatives.

Recognising the critical importance of the full participation of civil society interests in this process, proposals for inclusion in the action plan were discussed at three public meetings of a network of civil society and other interests held over the summer months, as well as through online contributions. This public consultation process was coordinated by Transparency International Ireland following a tender process undertaken by this Department.

The Report of a Consultation with Civil Society Representatives and Citizens on Ireland's Participation in the Open Government Partnership process was submitted to my Department on 1st October. Development of Ireland's first national action plan is therefore now well under way. It is anticipated that Ireland's draft action plan will be submitted for final approval by Government before the end of 2013. Countries become full members of the OGP when they submit their action plans by posting the final versions on the OGP website and endorse the Open Government Declaration. It is expected that Ireland will become a full member no later than 31st March 2014.

I wish to highlight that developing the action plan is just the first step. Officials, together with colleagues in all relevant Government Departments will continue to work with civil society in monitoring the implementation of the plan over the coming years. Action plans cover a two-year period and we will report on progress on an annual basis. Action plans are living documents and can be updated as needed.

Public Sector Staff Redundancies

20. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the reduction in public expenditure numbers that will be achieved in 2013 and 2014 from targeted redundancy and early retirement in his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42503/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The Government decided in late 2012 that voluntary redundancy can be introduced in certain targeted sections of the public service where staff surpluses are identified by management and where redeployment is not suitable. The purpose of the scheme is to assist Government in implementing restructuring and reform in a strategic and targeted manner. Greater efficiencies in the way the public service is going about its business means that some posts have and may be identified by Departments as surplus. VR can be offered in such circumstances.

In terms of my own Department, there is currently no VR scheme in operation and none is planned. There is no incentivised scheme for early retirement in the public service.

Construction Contracts

21. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when the code of practice for adjudication under the Construction Contracts Bill will be published. [42521/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The Programme for Government contains a commitment to introduce new legislation to protect small building subcontractors that have been denied payments from bigger companies. In this regard, Minister of State Brian Hayes worked closely with Senator Feargal Quinn to develop the Senator's private members' Construction Contracts Bill into a robust piece of legislation. I believe that there is considerable support both inside and outside the Dáil for these reforms. The Act,

which is subject to a Commencement Order, to allow for the development of a comprehensive code of practice was signed into law on 29 July 2013.

The key objective of the Construction Contracts Act is to ensure that cash flows down the supply chain on all construction contracts. This issue is addressed in the Act by providing statutory arrangements in relation to payments under construction contracts, including providing for interim payments. This will reduce the subcontractor's exposure to non-payment. The Bill also provides the means for subcontractors to enforce these rights, by suspending their labour and by introducing a new mechanism for the swift resolution of payment disputes through a process of adjudication.

This is an important piece of legislation aimed at creating a more level playing field between contractor and subcontractor in the construction sector. This legislation is a priority for Government. In this regard, my officials are currently working on the code of practice that will deliver a timely and cost effective adjudication procedure and to give effect to the legislation.

Question No. 22 answered with Question No. 17.

Estimates Process

23. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he expects any Supplementary Estimates to be needed in 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42498/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): At the end-September, 2013, the aggregate net voted total expenditure position was 2.7% (or €879 million) below profile, with all Departments broadly in line with profile.

On the current expenditure side, net current spending was 1.9% (or €574 million) below profile in the first 9 months of the year. On the capital side, net voted capital expenditure at the end September amounted to €1.5 billion, which is 17% (€305 million) below profile.

Each Minister and their Department are responsible for ensuring adherence with the Vote-level allocation for their area. My Department will continue to monitor all current and capital Departmental expenditure on a monthly basis and will work with Departments to ensure they can adhere to the expenditure ceilings set for them. At this point, the performance for the year to date is encouraging and it is too early to comment on the potential requirements for supplementary estimates by year-end.

National Lottery Licence Sale

24. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when details of the new national lottery licence holder will be announced. [42514/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): I announced on 3rd October 2013 that Premier Lotteries Ireland Limited, a consortium comprising Ontario Teachers Pension Plan (the owner of the Camelot Group), An Post and An Post pension funds, has been selected as the preferred applicant for the next National Lottery licence.

Discussions on finalising the terms of the licence will commence shortly between the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the Preferred Applicant. These discussions are

scheduled to be completed in November 2013 with a signature date in December 2013.

Freedom of Information Remit

25. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to restrict public private partnerships from the full terms of the proposed freedom of information legislation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42481/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The Freedom of Information Bill 2013, which I am currently sponsoring, passed Second Stage in the Dail last Thursday (3 October 2013). Section 40(1) of the Bill as currently drafted, provides that access to a record may be withheld if its release could have a serious adverse effect on the ability of the Government to manage the national economy or financial interests of the State, could result in undue disturbance of the ordinary course of business, could reasonably be expected to have a negative impact on decisions by enterprises to invest or expand in the State or could reasonably be expected to result in an unwarranted benefit or loss to a person or class of person. Section 40(2) lists a range of records to which subsection (1) applies and includes records relating to advising on or managing PPPs. The section does not restrict access to such records automatically but only in the circumstances where the grounds in Section 40(1) as I have set out above apply.

Ministerial Pensions

26. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will provide in tabular form the post-Haddington Road agreement annual pension payment to former office holders and, where applicable, to provide former details of Ministers' and taoisigh TD pensions also in a separate column. [42512/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): All public service pensions above €32,500 were reduced on 1 July 2013 as provided for in the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2013; the Government's intention to proceed with this change was noted in the Haddington Road Agreement.

In addition, a further effective pension cut applies, with effect from 1 September 2013, in the case of persons who receive two or more public service pensions which have a combined value in excess of €32,500. This further pension cut is based on applying the "Public Service Pension Reduction" (PSPR) to the combined value of the multiple public service pensions held by such a person, rather than to each such pension individually. This aggregation of pensions for PSPR purposes reduces the overall public service pension income of affected pensioners, including significant numbers of pensioners who receive both a TD pension and a Ministerial pension.

Actual application of these PSPR aggregation-derived adjustments is currently in train across public service pensioner payrolls. The overall process is complicated by several factors, including the need in each case to make co-ordinated adjustments to at least two pensions, along with the different payroll schedules and payment periodicities of pensioner payrolls. On this basis it is - unfortunately - not possible at present to supply a finalised list of Ministerial and TD pension amounts which would comprehensively reflect all of the PSPR aggregation-related reductions impacting pensions with effect from 1 September 2013. I nonetheless expect that this information will be to hand shortly and I will have it forwarded directly to the Deputy as soon as it becomes available.

Departmental Budgets

27. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if a standard form of financial management structures is in place in each Department. [42413/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): Each Government Department has responsibility for its financial management structures which must comply with standard public financial procedures, including the Public Spending Code. The main features of formal management structures include business planning, effective systems of budgetary control, monitoring of performance, appraisal of projects and programmes, effective cash management and internal audit.

All Departments are funded through the annual Estimates process and in each Department, the Secretary General, as Accounting Officer, prepares an annual account, the Appropriation Account, which is audited by the Comptroller and Auditor General. In each case, the accounts are accompanied by a Statement of Internal Financial Control. This confirms that appropriate mechanisms to review and evaluate the Department's financial management and control systems are in place on an on-going basis. These accounts and the report of the Comptroller and Auditor General are subsequently submitted to the Committee of Public Accounts for examination.

National Lottery Licence Sale

28. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the amount of the proceeds of the sale of the national lottery licence that will be received this year; when he expects to receive the full proceeds; the current plans for spending the proceeds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42479/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): As I announced on 3rd October 2013, Premier Lotteries Ireland Limited, a consortium comprising Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan (the owner of the Camelot Group), An Post and An Post pension funds, has been selected as the preferred applicant for the next National Lottery licence. Premier Lotteries Ireland Limited has met the Essential Requirements provided for in the competition for the licence and has submitted the highest Licence Fee proposal which is 405 million euro.

Discussions on finalising the terms of the licence will commence shortly between the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the Preferred Applicant. These discussions are scheduled to be completed in November with a signature date in December.

Under the terms of the new licence, half of the upfront payment is to be paid within ten working days of the signature of the licence. The remaining half of the upfront payment is to be paid within nine months of the signature of the licence.

I have made clear from the outset of this process that part of the upfront payment will be used to help build the new National Children's Hospital. The purposes for which the remaining funds will be used will be decided in the context of the Budget.

Freedom of Information Legislation

29. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans

to restrict the National Treasury Management Agency and its subsidiaries, the National Pensions Reserve Fund and the National Asset Management Agency, from the full terms of the proposed freedom of information legislation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42483/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The Freedom of Information Bill 2013, which I am currently sponsoring, passed Second Stage in the Dáil last Thursday (3 October 2013). The Bill as currently drafted provides that FOI will apply to the bodies referred to in the Deputy's question.

It was necessary to provide certain exemptions to these bodies to guard against the possibility that release of certain records under FOI would result in significant risk of a serious competitive disadvantage arising which would have the potential to give rise to substantial costs to the State and its citizens. The measures which I have proposed therefore aim to strike the right balance between the public interest in allowing access to official information held by these bodies and safeguarding highly commercially and market sensitive information against release.

The main exemptions that I have provided to the bodies mentioned in the question relate to the following:

(i) records concerning investors or potential investors in which the NTMA, NAMA, and the NPRF have invested or could potentially make an investment are exempt;

(ii) the NTMA will hold an exemption to protect records relating to the functions of the State Claims Agency (as set out in Part 2 of the NTMA Act 2000) other than in relation to the general administration of these functions.

(iii) an exemption is being provided for the NTMA operating in its NewEra capacity, covering records it receives from state bodies for the purposes of the management or disposal of an investment of public money if such bodies are exempt bodies for the purposes of FOI.

(iv) Notwithstanding the established and strong general principle that pay information relating to any person employed by a State body should be subject to FOI, having consulted with the Minister for Finance, I accepted the case made by the NTMA and supported by an independent report that the disclosure of full information relating to the remuneration of staff would place the body at a serious commercial disadvantage in terms of recruiting and retaining the expertise that it needs.

Public Service Reform Plan Measures

30. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which the Croke Park and Haddington Road agreements have to date achieved their targets; when he expects the benefit of such savings to manifest themselves by way of economic growth and improved employment prospects; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42439/13]

96. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he is satisfied that the combined benefits of the Croke Park and Haddington Road agreements will be adequate in terms of delivery of the objectives set; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42742/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 30 and 96 together.

It is clear that the Public Service Agreement or ‘Croke Park Agreement’ has delivered on its objectives. In this context, I would highlight the final report of the Implementation Body, which concluded that the Croke Park Agreement delivered significant cost savings amounting to €1.8 billion over its lifetime. The Agreement also ensured the delivery of central reforms while acting as a facilitator for a large number of reforms at sectoral level, across all sectors of the Public Service, in a climate of industrial peace. The report also concluded that the overwhelming majority of commitments around cost extraction, reform and changed work practices had been substantially delivered.

The Haddington Road Agreement sets out the basis for the contribution of a further €1 billion by the public service pay and pensions bill to our fiscal recovery, which would not have been possible under the framework of the Croke Park Agreement. The €1 billion reduction in the public service pay and pensions bill is critical to ensuring that we deliver on our targets for fiscal consolidation.

The Agreement has already started to deliver on its objectives. Approximately €300 million in savings arising from the Agreement were incorporated into the Revised Estimates for 2013. Since 1 July, a number of changes in work practices and reforms have been implemented. In addition public servants are working longer hours which will result in the provision of a total of 15 million additional working hours across all sectors of the Public Service.

The additional working hours by public servants will help us to deliver long term and sustainable increases in productivity by reducing the requirement for paid overtime hours and agency costs, thereby leading to direct cash savings; and allowing management to maintain services against the backdrop of decreasing staff numbers.

The various reforms under the Agreement will allow us to implement long term sustainable change with a view to delivering a more efficient and effective modern Public Service capable of delivering high quality services to the citizens of this country.

Semi-State Bodies Privatisation

31. **Deputy Michael Colreavy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when, as part of his Department’s asset disposal programme, he expects the sale of Bord Gáis Energy to be complete; and if negotiations have begun on the future terms and conditions of BGE staff. [42517/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): As referred to in the Deputy’s question, Bord Gáis Éireann is in the process of selling its energy business, Bord Gáis Energy. BGE and its advisors, working with NewERA who are advising the Government in relation to the sale, are currently assessing the latest bids received for Bord Gáis Energy. The Deputy will understand that, at this very sensitive stage of the process, it would be inappropriate for me to make any further public comment on the matter.

With regard to the Deputy’s question on the future terms and conditions of BGE staff, while I have had no direct role in the sale transaction, I understand that discussions commenced some time ago between BGE management and the BGE Group of Unions on the terms and conditions of the BGE staff that are due to transfer under the new ownership arrangements.

State Properties

32. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if charities will be given access to currently unused State properties; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42493/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brian Hayes): The Office of Public Works stated policy for dealing with vacant State properties is to identify, in the first instance, if other government departments and/or agencies has a use for the properties. If there is no other State use for a property the OPW will then consider disposing of the property on the open market, if and when conditions prevail, in order to generate much needed revenue for the Exchequer.

If no State requirement is identified or if a decision is taken not to dispose of a particular property the OPW would consider, community involvement including charities, subject to the receipt of an appropriate business case which would indicate that the charity has the means to insure, maintain and manage the property. OPW is actively engaging with a number of community groups in respect of vacant properties.

Public Sector Staff Sick Leave

33. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he is satisfied that sufficient progress is being made in reducing the cost of sick leave within the public service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42488/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): As the Deputy will be aware, in July 2012 sick leave arrangements for all public service employees under the Croke Park Agreement were the subject of a Labour Court Recommendation for the introduction of a comprehensively reformed Sick Leave Scheme for the public service.

The basis to the reformed scheme was the unsustainable cost of sick leave for the public service (i.e. approximately €500m) and the urgent requirement in that context to reduce those costs by curbing absenteeism.

Under the new arrangements for most employees in the public service the amount of paid sick leave which they may be granted will be halved.

It is envisaged that significant cost savings will be achieved under the reforms through a parallel approach of revising the current paid sick leave arrangements and implementing more robust systems to manage sick leave actively by line managers.

Arrangements are currently being made by my Department, including through necessary legislative change to ensure that the new arrangements are fully in place from 1 January 2014.

The changes to self-certified sick leave were introduced from November 2012. The impact of the reduction in access to self-certified paid sick leave is, therefore, expected to be reflected in the costs of self-certified sick leave for 2013. The changes to certified sick leave, where the majority of sick leave costs arise (i.e. estimated at almost 90 per cent in 2012), will be implemented in January 2014.

My Department will be examining, in consultation with other Departments and the main sectors of the public service, appropriate arrangements for monitoring the impact of the reforms to paid sick leave in the public service.

State Properties Data

34. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the State's exposure to rents on vacant properties has decreased since the Government came to office; if he will provide an updated list of all properties rented by the State that are vacant at present including the annual rental amounts due in respect of each and the agency that acts as tenant; all former vacant rented properties which have become occupied in the past year; all formerly occupied properties which have fallen vacant in the same period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42298/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brian Hayes): The property portfolio of the State covers lands and buildings owned or leased by a wide variety of organisations in addition to the Civil Service, including local authorities, organisations such as the Health Services Executive and non-commercial State bodies such as the Industrial Development Authority and SFADCo. It would be necessary for the Deputy to obtain the information she requires from the different organisations concerned.

In the time available, it has not been possible for the Office of Public Works to collate the data required by the Deputy in so far as the Civil Service is concerned. The Office will, however, furnish the relevant data to the Deputy shortly.

Coastal Erosion

35. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the communication his Department has had with Fingal County Council over the past 18 months in relation to the provision of funding to deal with dune erosion and coastal protection. [42296/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brian Hayes): In February 2013, the Office of Public Works approved funding of €57,800 under the Minor Works Scheme to Fingal County Council for a coastal erosion and risk management study for Portrane/Rush and I am advised that the Council expects to have the report to hand shortly.

In March 2013, the OPW received a Minor Works Scheme coastal erosion funding application from the Council for Emergency Sea Defence Works for the R127 Balbriggan to Skerries Regional Road. This is currently being assessed. Further information with regard to this application has been received from the Council.

In June 2013, the Council submitted a coastal flooding application under the Minor Works Scheme for a study to develop the design of flood mitigation works at the Town Centre, Malahide. The OPW has sought further information on the application from the Council.

Departmental Staff Recruitment

36. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to take on additional staff to deliver the recently announced overhaul of the Irish Statute Book to be overseen by his Department. [42523/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): On 12th July 2013, the Government approved my proposals to continue with the task of overhauling and simplifying the statute book, to be delivered initially through a series of statute law revision

Bills focusing on eliminating obsolete regulations and charters before Irish independence and obsolete legislation more widely since independence.

At present, the Statute Law Revision Programme is being led and managed by two professional legal personnel (Project Director and Project Manager) engaged under contract with my Department. In addition, under the National JobBridge Scheme, three researchers have been offered and accepted placements in recent weeks to work on the project, joining three other researchers already working on the project who have also been appointed under this Scheme. These staffing arrangements correspond to those in place when the project was previously located in the Office of the Attorney General where it was initiated.

Responsibility for the SLRP transferred to my Department in January 2012.

National Procurement Service Framework Agreements

37. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his Department's procurement reform programme and the work of the new office of government procurement. [42524/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): Reform of public procurement is one of the major projects of key strategic importance in the Government's Public Service Reform Plan. Procurement of supplies and services accounts for around €9 billion of current spending by the State per annum. This represents a very significant portion of overall spending and it is, therefore, essential that the Public Service achieves maximum value for money and operational efficiency in its approach to public procurement.

In this regard, an external review of the central procurement function was commissioned by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. The report of the review, which was published in late last year, found that significant savings can be achieved through the implementation of a transformational change to the central procurement model. The report estimates that implementation of its recommendations, over a three-year period, could yield potential annual savings in the range of €249 million to €637 million on an addressable spend of €7 billion, depending on the approach taken.

In order to realise these benefits the National Procurement Service has put in place a number of national arrangements designed to secure better value for money from leveraging the public service's buying power in relation to a range of goods and services that are commonly purchased across the public service. These national arrangements have benefits that include:

- cash savings;
- administrative savings from reduced duplication of tendering;
- greater purchasing expertise;
- improved consistency; and,
- enhanced service levels.

In relation to plans for further reform of public procurement, the review also found that significant savings can be achieved through the implementation of a transformational change to the central procurement model. In December 2012, arising out of recommendations in the review of the central procurement function the Minister announced the appointment of a Chief Procurement Officer to lead a key element of the Government's Public Service Reform agenda.

The new approach to public procurement will involve:

- integrating procurement policy, strategy and sourcing in one office;
- strengthening spend analytics and data management;
- much greater aggregation of purchasing across public bodies to achieve better value for money;
- examining the specifications set out for goods and services;
- evaluating demand levels to assess how demand and volume can be reduced; and
- strengthening supplier and category management.

Since the appointment of the Chief Procurement Officer on 28 January 2013, he has initiated and completed a series of engagements (workshops and one-to-one meetings) with key stakeholders within the public sector and their representatives in relation to the development of the proposed governance structures, implementation plan, transition arrangements and savings targets for the procurement function. The following sectors were engaged in workshops/meetings: Health, Education, Local Government, Defence, Justice, and other Central Government Departments.

In order to encourage greater SME participation the National Procurement Service, over the past three years, has conducted a targeted programme of education for suppliers who wish to learn more about doing business with the Irish Public Service. This programme consists of seminars, workshops and large scale ‘meet the buyer’ events hosted nationwide. To date the National Procurement Service has facilitated workshops and presented at seminars to over 3,000 SMEs nationwide. Parallel with these events the National Procurement Service also works closely with business representative bodies such as ISME and IBEC to provide briefings for their members.

To summarise: we in government want better value for money for our substantial procurement spend and we want Irish SMEs, where necessary, to form alliances and networks to ensure they can tender on a competitive basis for this work.

Departmental Expenditure

38. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the State can secure further savings in respect of legal fees across Departments and State agencies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42501/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The level of legal fees across Government Departments and State agencies will be examined in the light of the relevant expenditure allocations decided by the Government in the context of Budget 2014. Necessary adjustments will be made to ensure adherence to such allocations.

The adjustments will continue the work already achieved in recent years by bodies such as the State Claims Agency and the Offices of the Chief State Solicitor and Director of Public Prosecutions in reducing expenditure on legal services, both in the level of fees and through stringent examination of claims. In addition, my Department has recently issued a circular underlining the importance of competitive tendering for legal services and setting out a number of approaches and tools for public bodies to use in managing legal costs.

Compliance with the terms of the circular will be expected to play a major role in Departments' remaining within the constraints of the allocations to be contained in the forthcoming Budget.

National Lottery Licence Sale

39. **Deputy Michael Colreavy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the reason An Post National Lottery Company Labour Relations Commission proposals have been uploaded to his Department's licence competition virtual data room and presented as an agreed document despite no staff ballots on the proposals having been held thus far. [42516/13]

40. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the Labour Relations Commission and An Post National Lottery Company proposals have yet to be presented to workers for ballot; and the impact this industrial relations uncertainty will have on the awarding of the new licence. [42515/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 39 and 40 together.

My officials have held discussions in relation to the staff of the National Lottery Company with the relevant trade union and management interests. The matter was referred to the Labour Relations Commission (LRC). The LRC has prepared a proposal regarding the staffing issue and these proposals have been put forward to both the unions and management concerned on the basis that the parties involved agree to recommend them for acceptance. The LRC proposal provides that all staff of An Post National Lottery Company will transfer to the next operator and will fall under Transfer of Undertakings legislation (TUPE). TUPE does not cover pension entitlements. However, the LRC proposal provides that National Lottery employees who are members of the An Post pension schemes shall be offered by the new licence holder pension arrangements which are no less favourable than their current arrangements.

The LRC proposal was uploaded to the Virtual Data Room (VDR) for the competition for the next National Lottery licence. However, it was made clear to potential applicants for the licence who had access to the VDR that the document contained a proposal which had not yet been agreed.

Public Procurement Regulations

41. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if progress is being made on ensuring that public service procurement contracts are secured by Irish firms in a manner that is within EU guidelines; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42505/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): Under EU law, public contracts above certain values must be advertised EU-wide and awarded to the most competitive tender in an open and objective process. The aim is to promote an open, competitive and non-discriminatory public procurement regime which delivers value for money. It would be a breach of the rules for a public body to favour or discriminate against particular candidates on grounds of location or nationality and there are legal remedies which may be used against any public body infringing these rules.

I am aware that public procurement can be an important source of business for Irish small

and medium enterprises (SMEs). Current guidelines (Circular 10/10) issued by my Department require public bodies to promote participation of SMEs in the award of public contracts. The guidance also highlights practices that are to be avoided because they can unjustifiably hinder small businesses in competing for public contracts. The key provisions of the guidance include:

- supplies and general services contracts with an estimated value of €25,000 or more to be advertised on the www.etenders.gov.ie website;
- less use of “restrictive” tendering procedures and greater use of “open” tendering;
- ensuring that the levels set by contracting authorities for suitability criteria are justified and proportionate to the needs of the contract;
- sub-dividing larger requirements into lots where this is practical and can be done without compromising efficiency and value for money.

In order to encourage greater SME participation the National Procurement Service, over the past three years, has conducted a targeted programme of education for suppliers who wish to learn more about doing business with the Irish Public Service. This programme consists of seminars, workshops and large scale ‘meet the buyer’ events hosted nationwide. To date the National Procurement Service has facilitated workshops and presented at seminars to over 4,500 SMEs nationwide. Parallel with these events the National Procurement Service also works closely with business representative bodies such as ISME and IBEC to provide briefings for their members.

The National Procurement Service is responsible for producing annual statistical information in relation to above-EU threshold procurement activity by the Irish public sector and for providing these statistics to the European Commission. For works contracts the threshold is €5 million; for supplies and service contracts awarded by Government Departments the threshold is €130,000 and for the remainder of public bodies the threshold is €200,000. The threshold for supplies and service contracts of entities operating in utility sectors (water, energy, transport and postal) is €400,000. On average 5000 tenders for the procurement of goods, services and works are advertised on eTenders every year. I am informed by the National Procurement Service that the latest information available relates to 2010. In that year, the National Procurement Service estimates that approximately 5% of the overall spend went to non-domestic suppliers.

The importance of procurement policy becomes apparent when one sees that each year public authorities across the European Union spend 19% of GDP or approximately €2.4 trillion on goods, services and works. In this context, it is important to realise that the open market regime offers critical opportunities for Irish companies to win business abroad. In this regard, Enterprise Ireland and Intertrade Ireland offer training and support to businesses in order to raise awareness of public procurement opportunities and to improve the capacity of indigenous firms to compete effectively for these opportunities.

National Lottery Licence Sale

42. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the impact the legal proceedings initiated by the Rehab Group and Rehab Lotteries will have on the tendering process of the new national lottery licence. [42513/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): I received correspondence some months ago on behalf of Rehab Lotteries which gave notice of its intention to challenge the State regarding the establishment and operation of the National Lottery on

competition grounds. Having taken legal advice the response given was that the organisation's assertion was unfounded and that in the event of proceedings being issued they would be vigorously defended by the State. The threat of legal proceedings had no impact on the tendering process for the award of the National Lottery license.

Political Reform

43. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will provide an update on political reform; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42300/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): Work is ongoing in relation to the political reform priorities included in the Programme for Government. The summary position in relation to specific elements of the government reform programme is as follows:-

- The Ombudsman (Amendment) Act 2012 is now in force extending the Ombudsman's remit and strengthens the Ombudsman's powers;

- The Houses of the Oireachtas (Inquiries Privileges and Procedures) Act 2013 has recently been commenced;

- The Regulation of Lobbying Bill is currently being drafted by the Office of the Chief Parliamentary Counsel and the General Scheme of the Bill have been referred to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Finance and Public Expenditure Reform for pre-legislative scrutiny;

- The Protected Disclosures Bill 2013, establishing a detailed and comprehensive legislative framework protecting whistleblowers in all sectors of the economy, has passed Committee Stage in the Seanad;

- The Freedom of Information (Amendment) Bill 2013, published in July 2013, completed Second Stage in the Dáil last week. The Bill restores Ireland's FOI legislation and extends FOI to all public bodies;

- A revised draft Code of Practice for FOI for Public Bodies is in the process of being finalised drawing on the report and recommendations of expert FOI users, advocates and researchers;

- Work is continuing on developing proposals for consideration by Government for an overhaul of ethics legislation in response to the findings and recommendations of the final report of the Mahon Tribunal as well as to consolidate, modernise and simplify the existing legislative framework;

- Work is underway on the development of Ireland's first Open Government Partnership (OGP) national action plan in consultation with civil society interests;

- A comprehensive programme of Statute Law Revision has been approved by Government. The first Bill developed under this new programme is expected to deal with pre-1922 secondary legislation; and

- A review of the existing accountability framework for ministers and civil servants has been undertaken. A consultation paper based on the outcome of that review is currently being finalised.

Question No. 44 answered with Question No. 19.

Expenditure Reviews

45. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which his previously identified targets in respect of savings throughout the public sector, across all Departments, State and semi-State, have been achieved to date; the degree to which specific Departments have been particularly successful in this regard; if he is confident of meeting all outstanding targets in preparation for exit from the bailout programme; if any particular sectors fall short of meeting their targets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42438/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): Since this Government was established in 2011, a medium-term expenditure management process began with a Comprehensive Review of Expenditure exercise. This exercise was carried out by all Departments in order to identify ways of reducing expenditure in line with commitments under the Joint EU/IMF Programme of Financial Support for Ireland, while minimising the impact on service delivery. Following on from this, the Ministerial expenditure ceilings for 2012 - 2014 were introduced on an administrative basis in the *Comprehensive Expenditure Report*, published in December 2011. The CRE exercise forms the foundation of these ceilings and is the basis for all subsequent decisions on expenditure.

The *Expenditure Report 2013* was published on 5 December 2012 and includes further well-specified expenditure savings measures across every area of Government spending. The Deputy might be interested to know that both of these documents, along with a range of other informative reports and data are available on my Department's website at www.per.gov.ie.

The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for our EU/IMF Programme of financial assistance was signed in December 2010, and following each of the subsequent quarterly reviews by the Troika, an update of the MoU is agreed. Each update to the MoU can include the protraction or revisions to existing commitments along with new commitments.

The Irish Government's commitment to the EU/IMF Programme of Financial Support remains firm as is clearly illustrated by our continued strong record in implementing the agreed policy frameworks and measures while meeting all quantitative targets. Indeed, data released in the Exchequer Statement of 2 October, indicated that the Exchequer primary deficit target outlined in the EU/IMF Programme was met for the twelfth consecutive quarter. It is the Government's intention to achieve a successful and durable exit from our programme and to make a full and sustainable return to the financial markets.

National Monuments

46. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to incorporate Kilmainham Court House into the Kilmainham Jail experience; and the timeline for the incorporation of the court house. [38501/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brian Hayes): Kilmainham Gaol is a National Monument site in the care of the Office of Public Works (OPW) and, with 310,910 visitors in 2012, is one of the most popular tourist sites in Ireland.

The OPW's role at Kilmainham is to maintain the physical fabric of the site and to present it to the public through a dedicated Guide Service, explaining its 217 year history and its role in some of the key events in the formation of the State.

The site opens to the public on a fulltime basis, attracting significant numbers of visitors and sustaining a strong income profile. As well as its tourist and heritage attractiveness to visitors, it is also the preferred chosen venue for frequent formal events and functions of social, cultural, artistic, civic and diplomatic significance. However, its capacity to deal with an ever-increasing demand is severely limited currently by a number of key factors, most notably the physical limitations of the building which was obviously constructed with a different purpose in mind and which is not ideally configured to sustain an exponentially increasing volume of visitors. It is expected that further pressure will be an inevitable consequence of an expected increase in visitor numbers in the period ahead, particularly in the context of the interest generated by the various commemoration events over the next few years.

At current levels, the existing Gaol building is at absolute capacity and cannot sustain further large scale increases in visitor traffic without significant risk to the fabric of the Monument and to the comfort and safety of visitors.

A possibility for expansion was identified in the adjacent former Kilmainham Court House building which will be adapted and incorporated into the Heritage site offering. This will allow the Gaol operation to expand and will greatly improve the possibilities for strong continued visitor growth, while creating additional capacity to deal with visitors in a more modern setting and providing the needed ancillary curatorial, exhibition, research and welfare facilities which must be regarded as key objectives in a national heritage presentation of this type.

A public event was held at the Courthouse building in July this year when the Courts Service formally handed over the building to the Commissioners of Public Works, thus signalling the public commencement of this significant and important cultural and historic project.

The initial phase of works, which has commenced, focusses on the renewal of the roof fabric and later phases will address the substantive works needed to provide for modern visitor facilities appropriate to this nationally-important site. The project is targeted to be completed in time for the 1916 Centenary commemoration.

Flood Prevention Measures

47. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the steps he is taking to address the summer flooding in the Shannon Callows; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42412/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brian Hayes): There is on-going progress in respect of the River Shannon Catchment Flood Risk Assessment & Management Study which is the core strategy for addressing flood risk in the Shannon Basin.

The Deputy is aware that the ESB agreed to lower its target operating level in Lough Ree in the early summer on a trial basis as part of the Catchment Flood Risk Assessment & Management (CFRAM) process. This new interim regime for the management of levels on the River Shannon was implemented this summer.

A meeting between the ESB, Waterways Ireland and the Office of Public Works to review the interim operating regime is due to take place shortly.

Question No. 48 answered with Question No. 14.

Question No. 49 withdrawn.

Semi-State Bodies Dividends

50. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if his attention has been drawn to the fact that members of the ESB group of unions have initiated a legal challenge against the ESB and the Government regarding the special dividend the company is due to pay to the State next year which the union members allege is unlawful as the payment is based on wrongly prepared accounts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42520/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): I am aware of the legal challenge against the ESB, which is, of course, a matter for the Board and Management of the ESB. In terms of Ministerial portfolios, clarifications regarding ESB would be for my colleague, the Minister for D/CENR, in the first instance. That said, I understand that such issues were raised in regard to the distribution of the normal dividend at the AGM earlier this year and that the Chairman of the board proceeded with the meeting, including approval of the accounts and of payment of the normal dividend, on the basis of legal and financial advice that all was in order.

Human Rights Issues

51. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will request the Russian Government to free the Greenpeace activists who were charged with piracy as a result of their involvement in peaceful protest. [42539/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I am aware that a group of thirty activists affiliated with Greenpeace entered a Gazprom platform off the Russian coast on 18 September and were subsequently detained by the Russian authorities. All have now been charged with the serious crime of piracy. While there are no Irish citizens involved, the situation has been monitored by my Department and the Irish Embassy in Moscow. We are not in a position to say whether the actions undertaken by Greenpeace were merely a case of illegal entry or if any risks to the safety or operation of the rig were involved. However, I would urge the Russian authorities to respond in a proportionate way to any breach of the law which I hope can lead to a rapid release of those involved. In that connection, I note statements reportedly made by President Putin to the effect that he does not personally consider the incident to be an act of piracy. I would also call on the Russian authorities to ensure that the activists receive the legal and consular assistance to which they are entitled.

Overseas Development Aid Issues

52. **Deputy Patrick Nulty** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his position on Ireland's aid commitments in budget 2014; if he will ensure that budget 2014 meets Ireland's commitments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42669/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Joe Costello): 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 – allocating €629 million on ODA in 2012 and €622 million in 2013. These very significant allocations of public funds clearly demonstrate that we have consolidated the development assistance budget - a major achievement in light of the very difficult fiscal conditions facing the Government. Equally importantly, our aid programme remains one of the best in the world and our leadership on the hunger and nutrition agendas continues to be acknowledged internationally.

The Estimates process for Budget 2014 is now in its final stages and is being framed in the context of the Government's overall fiscal consolidation strategy. The Departmental budget allocations for 2014 will be a matter for Government decision and will be announced in the Budget Statement next week.

Diplomatic Representation Expenditure

53. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the individual cost for each of Ireland's embassies for each of the past five years; the budget breakdown for each embassy in 2012; the number of jobs that are directly attributed to each of Ireland's embassies; and the cost per job for each of Ireland's embassies. [42758/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): Ireland's missions abroad perform a wide range of functions in pursuit of Ireland's foreign policy interests. These include representing and advancing government policies with other States and in international organisations, in particular the EU and the UN; economic, trade and cultural promotion; frontline consular and passport services to Irish citizens overseas; engaging with Irish communities and harnessing the resource they offer in assisting economic recovery; and programme management, particularly in Irish Aid priority countries. The figures in the tables below include expenditure charged to mission budgets. Salary and related costs of staff posted from Ireland are not included as they are a charge on the overall budget of the Department rather than on a specific mission. Local staff salaries in missions abroad are reflective of the prevailing labour market conditions in the host country. Capital expenditure is not included as such expenditure does not form part of the Mission's budget. For ease of reference, the figures provided have been separated into Vote 28 Foreign Affairs and Trade and Vote 27 International Cooperation. The costs of a number of missions that manage significant programmes on behalf of Irish Aid are charged to Vote 27. The effective implementation of the aid programmes necessarily entails additional management and oversight costs which are included in the figures provided below. In addition to 25 locally recruited core staff, in the region of 180 locally-employed staff are engaged on the development cooperation side to meet technical requirements in specific programme areas. The numbers of such staff in each mission at any time varies in accordance with programme requirements.

Table I Vote 28 Mission Budgets 2009-2013 - All figures in Euro

Mission	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013 (to Oct 7) provisional
Berne	427,988	429,447	499,593	494,120	350,546
Berlin	1,021,130	907,409	926,903	913,175	687,680
Boston	373,100	377,114	359,624	322,655	276,833

Mission	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013 (to Oct 7) provisional
Brussels (Embassy incl. PfP)	1,132,756	816,501	799,662	865,955	522,728
Brussels (Permanent Representation to the EU)	3,312,397	3,322,071	3,358,265	3,475,453	3,007,136
Buenos Aires	372,902	438,541	415,840	389,242	245,222
Cairo	396,525	382,190	423,531	449,905	314,115
Canberra	659,319	760,935	746,570	814,655	570,560
Chicago	326,566	345,200	341,645	310,363	251,385
Copenhagen	423,347	400,517	383,102	371,804	290,903
Geneva	1,075,171	1,158,745	1,262,958	1,282,415	967,805
The Hague	652,976	741,184	652,113	698,164	491,815
Abuja	290,016	278,241	252,983	578,891	234,939
Lisbon	376,881	347,406	427,883	378,173	283,960
London (Includes PPO London)	3,807,568	3,448,547	3,064,169	3,082,408	1,821,250
Luxembourg	692,201	687,546	387,042	390,796	279,958
Madrid	1,192,169	1,073,062	971,018	948,846	715,302
Moscow	759,994	758,895	731,157	747,034	589,501
New Delhi	474,056	743,338	668,436	625,499	784,319
New York - PM	1,266,438	1,773,546	1,956,879	1,482,968	1,476,496
New York - C.G.	1,761,317	1,798,093	1,669,443	1,807,527	1,281,099
Ottawa	484,809	555,300	561,303	592,000	452,786
Paris	1,684,107	1,698,403	1,647,082	1,642,537	1,166,859
Rome	1,200,155	1,187,410	1,146,284	1,236,144	694,441
San Francisco	418,088	427,629	339,433	354,308	290,175
Stockholm	396,501	474,031	614,346	543,748	394,729
Tokyo	2,040,450	1,581,230	2,284,440	1,974,624	751,556
Vienna	636,769	654,487	655,547	645,485	452,218
Washington	1,200,800	1,236,780	1,072,065	1,100,010	811,732
Oslo	594,344	551,146	643,122	626,232	491,463
Strasbourg	425,598	415,027	409,611	404,664	306,560
Riyadh	505,645	344,037	325,653	356,302	239,825
Athens	479,663	489,042	471,858	432,334	324,914
Beijing	674,053	728,852	720,028	849,941	393,067
Seoul	336,119	677,583	357,767	361,906	620,573
Warsaw	823,095	782,993	737,398	759,222	491,508
Helsinki	560,166	526,400	508,919	458,120	351,807
Pretoria	533,210	684,301	609,858	543,506	344,127
Prague	544,386	566,321	570,991	543,723	366,675
Kuala Lumpur	343,486	362,896	351,349	381,455	287,652
Budapest	487,050	453,678	486,420	435,054	323,714

Questions - Written Answers

Mission	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013 (to Oct 7) provisional
OSCE Vienna	438,703	482,715	406,167	402,388	311,739
Tel Aviv	581,112	585,185	548,468	594,682	552,418
Edinburgh	221,185	229,941	198,844	205,443	162,164
Ankara	389,863	394,114	379,651	388,218	286,987
Mexico	451,487	441,289	437,906	480,370	323,079
Sydney	483,921	565,349	624,044	695,376	486,293
Shanghai	506,973	552,387	555,166	594,016	339,994
Singapore	801,544	821,066	814,117	929,842	541,696
Ramallah	286,028	348,085	241,485	358,061	269,687
Nicosia	405,689	397,820	366,537	278,623	200,569
Ljubljana	431,438	421,396	400,385	391,035	258,221
Tallinn	350,750	412,343	378,515	380,644	206,016
Bratislava	409,568	358,004	356,754	294,081	213,785
Brasilia	451,615	554,554	529,305	522,166	352,221
Bucharest	525,399	433,408	472,071	462,086	296,672
Sofia	394,384	367,570	360,831	355,993	277,278
Riga	368,369	341,547	183,604	175,148	135,401
Vilnius	452,427	426,413	414,957	367,982	220,390
Valletta	326,847	324,574	324,249	332,877	228,102
Abu Dhabi	372,155	545,048	385,694	388,784	128,580
Atlanta - Consulate	0	35,380	132,798	171,487	113,814
Holy See	429,188	435,726	413,623	7,334	9,413
Tehran	508,622	449,698	248,257	246,413	0

Table II Vote 28 Mission Budget Breakdown 2012 - All figures in Euro

Mission	A1 Salaries, Wages & Allowances	A2 Travel & Subsistence	A3 Incidental Expenses	A4 Postal & Telecom Expenses	A5 Office machinery & other office expenses	A6 Office Premises Expenses
Berne	352,486	6,275	12,077	14,112	3,995	105,173
Berlin	485,446	18,316	25,298	24,767	8,380	350,969
Boston	233,288	4,309	1,497	11,530	4,567	67,463
Brussels Embassy incl.PfP	355,505	4,167	13,571	8,265	7,565	484,447
Brussels (Permanent Representation to the EU)	1,863,134	187,745	158,336	113,483	78,913	1,073,841
Buenos Aires	188,355	24,656	10,759	10,497	907	154,068
Cairo	220,509	21,395	5,597	20,183	2,360	179,860
Canberra	585,498	60,655	13,718	39,676	11,733	103,376

Mission	A1 Salaries, Wages & Allowances	A2 Travel & Subsistence	A3 Incidental Expenses	A4 Postal & Telecom Expenses	A5 Office machinery & other office expenses	A6 Office Premises Expenses
Chicago	234,620	13,895	1,830	17,979	4,223	37,817
Copenhagen	271,042	6,878	15,822	13,306	3,240	61,517
Geneva	703,743	35,140	11,200	24,554	9,722	498,056
The Hague	478,255	5,888	55,699	23,724	4,615	129,982
Abuja	151,642	39,557	53,601	14,761	5,891	313,439
Lisbon	199,341	3,412	9,279	20,474	1,486	144,181
London incl. PPO	1,696,886	46,471	89,322	159,999	64,713	1,025,019
Luxembourg	253,468	3	4,530	6,426	1,326	125,043
Madrid	592,184	6,827	8,654	25,371	4,570	311,239
Moscow	404,176	38,357	24,988	33,475	8,175	237,864
New Delhi	177,043	31,721	11,515	15,611	8,948	380,661
New York - PMUN	899,805	2,606	9,615	33,361	18,800	518,782
New York - Consul General.	869,113	20,027	14,189	8,149	21,126	874,924
Ottawa	340,061	39,117	19,200	24,504	11,725	157,394
Paris	1,231,041	22,147	21,924	33,339	13,235	320,851
Rome	759,610	23,350	38,469	32,321	9,743	372,650
San Francisco	202,647	10,289	1,292	-21,149	7,399	153,830
Stockholm	251,279	4,069	10,127	9,714	3,297	265,261
Tokyo	894,385	19,045	41,368	25,967	7,488	986,372
Vienna	375,971	2,117	13,614	10,270	4,942	238,572
Washington	884,578	47,219	27,627	42,479	9,571	88,537
Oslo	275,198	1,226	13,531	13,621	3,690	318,966
Strasbourg	271,237	4,987	6,752	12,505	3,452	105,731
Riyadh	261,172	16,321	11,084	10,411	4,547	52,768
Athens	246,386	6,609	12,141	9,527	2,033	155,638
Beijing	355,444	37,459	24,786	31,498	7,795	392,959
Seoul	156,792	10,290	5,732	10,429	2,019	176,643
Warsaw	279,409	30,410	28,083	21,264	7,363	392,692
Helsinki	215,505	3,305	9,910	10,738	2,641	216,022
Pretoria	259,793	29,653	22,430	37,644	10,395	183,591
Prague	274,434	8,606	15,193	13,904	6,948	224,638
Kuala Lumpur	158,954	6,339	10,757	8,740	1,933	194,731
Budapest	128,007	7,884	12,550	11,926	1,789	272,898
OSCE - Vienna	192,415	17,531	10,601	15,215	3,277	163,349
Tel Aviv	212,167	2,730	16,297	12,588	1,819	349,081
Edinburgh	108,743	2,057	2,890	9,243	2,201	80,309

Questions - Written Answers

Mission	A1 Salaries, Wages & Allowances	A2 Travel & Subsistence	A3 Incidental Expenses	A4 Postal & Telecom Expenses	A5 Office machinery & other office expenses	A6 Office Premises Expenses
Ankara	191,677	18,209	14,560	15,099	5,925	142,747
Mexico	194,623	34,647	13,359	21,559	2,605	213,576
Sydney	348,278	6,761	2,257	21,603	4,625	311,852
Shanghai	155,658	6,458	10,455	14,544	3,772	403,129
Singapore	330,317	28,798	9,687	2,357	1,984	556,700
Ramallah	169,064	2,403	19,896	7,753	1,818	157,127
Nicosia	124,581	228	6,882	5,747	2,026	139,157
Ljubljana	201,644	10,869	15,147	9,524	4,807	149,044
Tallinn	61,588	2,406	5,503	7,652	1,776	301,719
Bratislava	92,438	1,565	5,781	6,286	1,329	186,683
Brasilia	237,266	25,750	11,840	17,609	2,229	227,473
Bucharest	159,532	4,299	10,704	10,580	2,738	274,233
Sofia	103,524	1,933	21,037	7,304	436	221,759
Riga	62,341	1,258	7,245	4,435	1,691	98,177
Vilnius	116,847	49	7,934	5,745	1,190	236,218
Valletta	88,515	11,397	1,459	10,816	3,604	217,087
Abu Dhabi	168,222	15,481	11,488	10,159	2,261	181,174
Atlanta - Consulate	97,905	11,430	1,843	6,575	1,350	52,385
Holy See	1,688	5,654	-	-	-	-
Tehran	274,506	145	-12,417	509	12	-16,341

Table III Vote 28 Current Number of Staff in Each Mission*

Mission	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Officers posted from HQ	Locally engaged (including agency) administrative, clerical and other support staff
Abu Dhabi	2	4
Abuja	2	5
Ankara	3	4
Athens	3	4.3*
Atlanta	1	1
Beijing	3	12
Berlin	5	7
Berne	2	3
Boston	2	3
Brasilia	2	4
Bratislava	1	2
Brussels (Embassy – including PFP)	4	4
Brussels (Permanent Representation to the European Union)	37	6
Bucharest	2	5

Mission	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Officers posted from HQ	Locally engaged (including agency) administrative, clerical and other support staff
Budapest	2	4
Buenos Aires	2	3.4*
Cairo	3	6
Canberra	2	7.1*
Chicago	2	3.4*
Copenhagen	2	4.4*
Edinburgh	2	1
Geneva (Permanent Mission to the United Nations) (Including temporary extra staff relating to Ireland's membership of the UN Human Rights Council)	12	3.5*
Helsinki	2	3
Kuala Lumpur	2	5.5*
Lisbon	2	3
Ljubljana	2	3
London (including PPO)	24	13.5*
Luxembourg	1	3.5
Madrid	3	9
Mexico	3	5
Moscow	5	9
New Delhi	3	6
New York - Consulate General	4	12
New York (Permanent Mission to the United Nations)	9	6
Nicosia	1	3
Oslo	2	3
Ottawa	3	5
Paris	5	13
Paris (Permanent Mission to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development and UNESCO)	2	1
Prague	2	5
Pretoria	4	8
Ramallah	2	4
Riga	1	2
Riyadh	2	8
Rome	2	8.8*
San Francisco	2	3
Seoul	2	4
Shanghai	3	4
Singapore	2	4
Sofia	2	4
Stockholm	2	3
Strasbourg	3	3

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Mission	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Officers posted from HQ	Locally engaged (including agency) administrative, clerical and other support staff
Sydney	2	3
Tallinn	1	2
Tel Aviv	2	3.5**
The Hague	3	5
Tokyo	3	7
Valletta	1	2
Vienna (Embassy)	3	5
Vienna (Permanent Mission to the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe)	2	3
Vilnius	2	3
Warsaw	3	4
Washington DC	8	8

*The table does not include Consulates headed by Honorary Consuls, the staff of which are not employees of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

** Full Time Equivalent - this number takes account of officers on work-sharing arrangements.

Table IV Vote 28 Current Average Salary of Local Staff

Mission	Number of Local Staff	Average Salary
Abu Dhabi	4	24,891
Abuja	5	19,697
Ankara	4	21,442
Athens	4.3	27,841
Atlanta - Consulate	1	33,540
Beijing	12	16,242
Berlin	7	33,766
Berne	3	59,831
Boston	3	41,213
Brasilia	4	26,673
Bratislava	2	27,192
Brussels (Embassy incl.PfP)	4	24,729
Brussels (Permanent Representation to the EU)	6	32,475
Bucharest	5	14,001
Budapest	4	12,050
Buenos Aires	3.4	33,736
Cairo	6	16,840
Canberra	7.1	60,231
Chicago	3.4	38,470
Copenhagen	4.4	41,516
Edinburgh	1	3,248
Geneva	3.5	73,000
Helsinki	3	31,224

Mission	Number of Local Staff	Average Salary
Kuala Lumpur	5.5	10,754
Lisbon	3	32,104
Ljubljana	3	33,069
London - PPO	13.5	10,331
Luxembourg	3.5	48,834
Madrid	9	33,046
Mexico	5	14,507
Moscow	9	15,253
New Delhi	6	10,940
New York - C.G.	12	40,501
New York - PMUN	6	45,499
Nicosia	3	26,880
OSCE- Vienna	3	25,903
Oslo	3	55,329
Ottawa	5	39,383
Paris incl. OSCE	14	28,442
Prague	5	25,006
Pretoria	8	18,449
Ramallah	4	28,877
Riga	2	25,412
Riyadh	8	20,754
Rome	8.8	50,201
San Francisco	3	33,032
Seoul	4	21,532
Shanghai	4	14,540
Singapore	4	35,110
Sofia	4	15,050
Stockholm	3	47,190
Strasbourg	3	41,222
Sydney	3	59,558
Tallinn	2	15,209
Tel Aviv	3.5	34,309
The Hague	5	49,039
Tokyo	7	74,930
Valletta	2	31,230
Vienna	5	41,382
Vilnius	3	25,476
Warsaw	4	30,056
Washington	8	37,074

Table V Vote 27 Mission Budgets 2009-2013 - All figures in Euro

Mission	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013- Budget Allocation
Ethiopia	814,794	882,686	548,335	519,543	477,059
Tanzania	791,452	705,715	671,611	741,521	871,975

Questions - Written Answers

Sierra Leone	215,849	197,232	280,358	231,457	273,750
Vietnam	538,448	605,144	587,427	622,536	602,000
Uganda	1,065,810	1,113,518	744,844	879,949	1,526,980
Malawi	415,038	427,874	394,720	395,899	543,420
Zambia	927,187	1,061,047	1,063,136	934,416	1,103,200
Mozambique	1,178,145	983,406	833,362	882,549	996,701
Lesotho	468,849	497,411	496,429	502,659	561,510
South Africa	296,057	375,166	336,384	305,053	369,170
Timor Leste	165,803	148,716	108,723	142,081	0

Table VI Vote 27 Mission Budget Breakdown 2012 - All figures in Euro

Subhead-Mission	A1 Salaries & Allowances	A2 Travel & Subsistence	A3 Incidentals	A4 Postal & Telecomms	A5 Office Machinery & Other Office Expenses	A6 Premises	Total
Ethiopia	356,792	14,346	56,086	9,025	11,586	71,708	519,543
Tanzania	480,919	53,401	103,820	22,723	25,303	55,356	741,521
Sierra Leone	46,087	29,243	25,078	9,489	5,088	116,471	231,457
Vietnam	167,447	83,591	40,160	13,637	10,156	307,544	622,536
Uganda	424,384	57,275	160,659	21,521	17,566	198,544	879,949
Malawi	116,237	39,983	80,326	19,404	22,997	116,952	395,899
Zambia	707,639	52,015	94,417	20,876	14,415	45,056	934,416
Mozambique	365,122	80,644	149,910	37,265	33,985	215,622	882,549
Lesotho	294,141	24,252	43,095	26,619	8,513	106,039	502,659
Sth. Africa	132,669	21,062	54,931	3,174	5,253	87,964	305,053
Timor Leste	36,286	19,819	17,655	10,423	3,556	54,342	142,081

Job Creation Data

54. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of jobs that have been created here that are directly attributable to his Department for each of the past two years. [42761/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): The Government's Trade Strategy, *Trading and Investing in a Smart Economy*, identifies high level targets for growth in exports, investment, tourism and jobs for the period to 2015 and feeds into the targets set in the Action Plan for Jobs. These targets have been identified by the relevant Departments and the State Agencies under their aegis. In overseas markets, my Department and our Embassy network work very closely with the State Agencies, including Enterprise Ire-

land, IDA Ireland, Bord Bia and Tourism Ireland. In the twenty seven priority overseas markets identified under the Strategy, Local Market Teams chaired by the Ambassador and including the State Agencies present in the particular market have been established to drive the common effort towards the achievement of the identified targets. Local Market Plans drawn up by these teams are reviewed by the Export Trade Council which I chair and which includes the relevant Ministers as well as the CEOs of the State Agencies and members from the private sector. The work of my Department and the Embassy network in engaging with key political and business figures in overseas markets, and on economic messaging designed to enhance confidence in our economic recovery, contributes directly to the achievement of the growth in domestic employment, as does the ongoing extensive support given by our Embassies to the trade missions organised by the State Agencies. This year our Embassies will support a total of eighteen Ministerial-led Enterprise Ireland trade missions involving Irish companies, as well as a range of other overseas Ministerial visits focussed on driving job growth at home through building our international trading and investment opportunities, in both mature and high growth markets. Each year the St. Patrick's Day period provides a particular focus for our efforts to support job creation in the domestic economy and the Embassy network exploits to the full all the opportunities it provides for Ministerial led missions and other economic, business and cultural activity.

The Global Irish Network established by my Department is also contributing its ideas and support to the drive for jobs and I am pleased to note that at the most recent meeting of the Global Irish Economic Forum in Dublin Castle last weekend there was a very positive interaction at an Enterprise Ireland industry event between the Irish SME sector and the network.

Departmental Staff Data

55. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the reduction in public expenditure numbers that will be achieved in 2013 and 2014 from targeted redundancy and early retirement in his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43036/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): To date, a total of eighteen age-related retirements have taken place in 2013 in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. A further eight officers will retire by the end of 2013 i.e. six age-related retirements and two under the cost neutral Early Retirement Scheme. A total of fourteen officers are scheduled to retire in 2014, on reaching mandatory retirement age. No officer has so far submitted notice of an intention to retire under the cost neutral Early Retirement Scheme in 2014. There is no targeted redundancy scheme in place in my Department.

Credit Review Office Appeals

56. **Deputy Derek Nolan** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide a county breakdown, in tabular form, of the number of businesses which have used State supports such as the Credit Review Office; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42615/13]

57. **Deputy Derek Nolan** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide a county breakdown in tabular form of the number of businesses in the constituency of Galway West which have used State supports for Irish businesses such as the Credit Review Office; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42616/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 56 and 57 together.

The Credit Review Office (CRO) has provided me with the following information:

County	Number of Applications To Date
Carlow	4
Cavan	6
Clare	4
Cork	36
Donegal	9
Dublin	101
Galway	9
Kerry	15
Kildare	11
Kilkenny	4
Laois	7
Leitrim	2
Limerick	22
Longford	6
Louth	8
Mayo	9
Meath	11
Monaghan	2
Offaly	4
Roscommon	4
Sligo	3
Tipperary	17
Waterford	12
Westmeath	7
Wexford	9
Wicklow	10
Total	332

The CRO does not record applications by constituency but I am informed that there have been 9 applications to the CRO by SMEs in the county of Galway.

Tax Reliefs Availability

58. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Finance the tax breaks available to wind turbine owners; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42548/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): With regard to VAT, persons who are registered for VAT are entitled to claim input credit for VAT charged on the installation of a wind turbine for use in their taxable activities. In addition, the VAT (Refund of Tax) (Flat-rate Farmers) Order 2012 provides that flat-rate farmers, who are not registered for VAT, can claim a refund of tax borne on the purchase of a wind turbine for the purposes of micro-generation of electricity for use in a farm business, where that wind turbine was purchased on or after 1 January 2012.

In addition, companies carrying on green energy activities (i.e. activities undertaken with

a view to producing energy from renewable resources) can qualify for the Employment and Investment Incentive.

There is also corporation tax relief for corporate investment in renewable energy.

The purpose of the scheme is to encourage investment in renewable energy projects and to facilitate the growth of electricity generation capacity using these sources.

The tax relief applies to corporate equity investments in certain renewable energy generation projects. Qualifying investments are eligible for tax relief in the form of a deduction from a company's profits.

To qualify for the relief the energy project must be approved by the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources and be in one of the following categories of technology: solar, wind, hydro and biomass.

The value of the investment on which relief can be given is capped at the lesser of 50% of all capital expenditure, excluding expenditure on lands and net of grants, or €9.5 million for a single project.

Investment by a company or group is capped at €12.7 million per annum and unless the shares are held for at least five years by the company, the relief will be withdrawn.

The qualifying period for the scheme of tax relief for corporate investment in certain renewable energy projects runs until 31 December 2014.

Credit Unions Issues

59. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail** asked the Minister for Finance if, in the course of a recent meeting with a group (details supplied) in County Kildare, he mentioned a specific figure as being the amount necessary to resolve issues relating to a financial institution; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42560/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Question is referring to the proposed combination between Newbridge Credit Union and Naas Credit Union. I wish to confirm that in the course of the meeting with the Newbridge Credit Union Action Group, I did not mention a specific figure regarding the cost of the combination of these credit unions.

As I stated in reply to Question Nos. 35 and 46 last week in clarification of this matter, the only cost figures to which I referred at that meeting were the "tens of millions" as previously set out by the Central Bank and any claims to the contrary are not correct.

Alcohol Pricing

60. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he will support a proposal of an additional €1 tax on cans of beer in order reduce anti-social activity. [42563/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Deputy should be aware that EU Directive 92/93, which governs the structure of alcohol taxation, requires that such taxes are applied by reference to the nature and strength of the product rather than the means of packaging. It does not provide for different tax treatment of alcohol products depending on where the product is sold. Accordingly, the introduction of such a levy would not be possible. The issue

of excise rates on alcohol will be considered in the context of the forthcoming Budget.

Budget Submissions

61. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he will support the pre-budget submission from Simon Communities in Ireland to make homelessness a priority issue. [42564/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): My Department has so far received in excess of 500 Pre-Budget Submissions from a wide range of groups and individuals. These are being considered by the relevant officials in the context of Budget and Finance Bill preparation. I can confirm that a submission from the Simon Community has been received. However, as the Deputy will be aware, it is not the practice of the Minister for Finance to discuss the details of measures which may be under consideration as part of the Budget and Finance Bill.

Tax Collection

62. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Finance if he will review with Revenue the position on whether taxes can only be paid online by a person; if he will confirm whether it is the case that certain taxes may only be paid online by non-ROS-registered persons; if this is the case, whether he considers this to be reasonable for those who do not have easy online access or limited computer skills; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42634/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that the Deputy may be referring to Local Property Tax (LPT), where individuals who own more than one property are obliged by law to file and pay their LPT online even if they are not ROS registered. In the context of Government policy on e-Government and e-payments, and Revenue's strategic objective of establishing the use of electronic channels as the norm, this seems to me to be a reasonable approach. Filing and paying of LPT is easier and more efficient online and taxpayers get more time to file.

Many owners of multiple properties impacted by this provision are in the business of letting those properties and it is improbable that they are not e-enabled for other purposes. However, recognising the need to provide an alternative service, the LPT legislation explicitly provides that a liable person may nominate another person – such as an agent or family member – to file on his or her behalf. Furthermore, from the outset, Revenue advised that owners of multiple properties could call to a Revenue office where staff would assist them to file their return electronically on Revenue computers. Finally, I am advised that during the LPT filing season Revenue recognised this requirement was causing difficulties in a number of instances where liable persons own small numbers of properties, and they provided a further option to pay and file by telephone.

I am satisfied that Revenue's response provides an appropriate range of options for owners of multiple properties to meet their LPT obligations.

Customs and Excise Controls

63. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if the customs and excise section of his Department can speed up or act on delays on containers coming from China because small and medium enterprises are suffering. [42645/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): This is a matter in the first instance for the Revenue Commissioners as the Irish tax and customs administration. I am advised by Revenue that they are not aware of any particular delays associated with the customs clearance of containers from China at any Irish ports or airports. Indeed, I am pleased to say that the clearance regime operated by Revenue conforms to international best practice. If the Deputy is aware of any individual instance of unreasonable delay, he should bring this to the attention of the Revenue Commissioners who will be happy to look into any specific instance of concern.

Tax Yield

64. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide, on an annual basis, corporation tax receipts each year since 2006. [42655/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Deputy may wish to know that this information as well as outturn and profile data on the other main taxation categories are published in the Statistics Databank on the Department of Finance website and is available at; <http://databank.finance.gov.ie/>.

For convenience, the information required follows.

-	Corporation tax receipts €000
2006	6,683,247
2007	6,390,625
2008	5,065,894
2009	3,900,306
2010	3,923,637
2011	3,520,193
2012	4,215,671

Corporation Tax Data

65. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the number of companies making corporation tax returns in excess of €1 million, €5 million, €10 million and so on, in increments of €5 million, for each of the years since 2006. [42656/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): It is assumed the Deputy is referring to the number of companies that filed corporation tax returns for the years outlined who had Net Trading Income (before deductions and charges) in excess of the amounts specified in the question. I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that the relevant figures are as contained in the Table CTS 1 of the Statistical Reports published annually by the Commissioners and can be found on the Revenue website at www.revenue.ie.

The latest year for which information is available from that source is for 2010 which is contained in the 2011 report.

The corresponding information for 2011 is available and will be included in the 2012 report on the website as soon as possible. Data for the year 2012 is not yet available.

Because of the Revenue Commissioners' obligation to observe confidentiality in relation to the taxation affairs of individual taxpayers and small groups of taxpayers, a breakdown by the bands requested by the Deputy is not provided in relation to incomes exceeding €10 million due

to the relatively small numbers of companies with incomes in excess of that level.

The following table shows the number of companies that filed corporation tax returns with Net Trading Income (before deductions and charges) in excess of €1 million, €5 million and €10 million for the years 2006-2011:

Number of companies with Net Trading Income (before deductions and charges)

Year	Number of Companies With > €1m	Number of Companies With > €5m	Number of Companies With > €10m
2006	3,089	968	571
2007	3,110	1,010	586
2008	2,241	741	441
2009	2,090	722	457
2010	1,965	710	463
2011	1,982	696	459

Tax Yield

66. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the income tax receipts, excluding DIRT, for each month since 2007. [42657/13]

67. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the levels of receipts for DIRT for each month since 2007. [42658/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 66 and 67 together.

The Deputy may wish to know that aggregate outturn and profile data on income tax and the other main taxation categories is published in the Statistics Databank on the Department of Finance website and is available at <http://databank.finance.gov.ie/>.

Monthly data on Deposit Interest Retention Tax receipts since 2007 is as follows.

Monthly DIRT Receipts €m

-	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
January	115.2	172.8	152.4	121.1	111.3	140.7	139.6
February	1.1	3.2	16.3	1.5	3.4	0.5	1.3
March	2.2	0.0	0.1	0.2	0.3	0.1	0.1
April	0.2	-0.3	0.0	0.0	117.4	160.9	147.1
May	0.4	-0.1	0.0	0.0	6.1	0.1	0.1
June	-0.2	-0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
July	-0.4	-0.1	0.0	0.0	114.7	143.4	111.4
August	-0.1	-0.1	0.0	0.0	0.3	0.1	0.0
September	0.0	-0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
October	351.3	446.9	437.2	321.7	116.7	133.9	-
November	0.2	30.4	6.8	0.2	2.7	0.1	-

-	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Decem-ber	1.9	1.2	1.4	0.9	0.4	0.8	-
Annual Total	471.8	653.8	614.1	445.7	473.3	580.6	399.6

Source: Revenue Commissioners

The negative figures that are displayed for some of the months of 2007 and 2008 reflect refunds of DIRT in appropriate circumstances. Section 34 of the Finance Act 2007 introduced a new scheme to allow the operation of DIRT exempt savings accounts where a qualifying individual, or an individual's spouse or civil partner, is aged 65 or over during the tax year and, the individual's income (or the joint income of the individual and his or her spouse or civil partner) is below the relevant annual exemption limit. This measure would have obviated the need for refund applications to Revenue over subsequent years.

Tax Code

68. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Finance the reason a divorced person is classified as self-employed for tax purposes (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42698/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Employees, including those who earn up to €3,174 of other income and who have this amount coded against their income tax credits, pay their income tax through the PAYE system. Any individual with income, and this can include maintenance income, not taxed through the PAYE system must pay their tax through the self-assessment system. While this does include self-employed individuals it can also include persons in receipt of interest, dividends, rents, etc. A divorced person in receipt of taxable maintenance payments is therefore not classified as a self-employed person but rather as a chargeable person and pays the income tax due on their income through the self-assessment system. This classification is simply the method through which the tax due on the maintenance payments, if any, is collected.

The same rates of income tax apply regardless of whether an individual pays their tax through the PAYE system or the self-assessment system.

To prevent double taxation of income, where a divorced person is liable to pay tax on receipt of a maintenance payment, then the divorced person paying the maintenance payment is entitled to a tax deduction for that maintenance payment.

Revenue Commissioners Operations

69. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the number of advanced opinions the Revenue Commissioners have offered to companies regarding their tax affairs; the number of these companies that are multinationals; the format used to give these opinions; and how often they are given. [42755/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that advance opinions are provided by Revenue to clarify the tax treatment of a proposed transaction or business activity under the relevant legislation so that taxpayers can file a correct tax return and comply fully with their tax obligations. Revenue opinions are non-

binding and seek to provide a considered and consistent interpretation of the applicable tax rules as set down in the legislation.

Revenue's practice in providing advance opinions to taxpayers is set out in published guidelines and tax briefings including, for example, the *Guidelines on Revenue's Technical Service to Practitioners and Business Taxpayers* which are available on the Revenue website. As there is a wide range of taxation information on the Revenue website and in Revenue publications, there are relatively limited circumstances where a company or tax practitioner should require an opinion from Revenue in advance of a proposed transaction or business activity.

An advance opinion will be given by Revenue only where the issues are complex, the transaction is unusual, information is not readily available or there is genuine uncertainty in relation to the interpretation or application of the relevant tax rules. Revenue will give an advance opinion on the tax treatment of a proposed transaction or business activity based on the information provided by the company or its agent and having regard to the relevant tax legislation and published Revenue practice.

Based on data available for the past three years, Revenue estimates that on average 115 advance opinions are issued to companies each year on corporation tax issues. The data available does not distinguish between opinions provided for multinational companies and those provided for other companies.

Non-Resident Companies

70. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if all Irish registered non-resident companies have to provide a country of residence; the penalty for failing to provide a country of residence; and the number of companies that have failed to declare a country of residence. [42764/13]

71. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if any Irish registered non-resident company that fails to provide a country of residence, will be deemed to be resident here. [42765/13]

72. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the number of companies that are Irish registered non-resident companies and the numbers by each country of residence. [42766/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 70 to 72, inclusive, together.

I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that Irish registered non-resident companies which do not carry on a trade in Ireland have no liability to Irish corporation tax and have no obligation to file an Irish corporation tax return.

Non-resident companies that carry on a trade in Ireland through a branch or agency are liable to corporation tax on their branch or agency profits. Such companies are obliged to file a corporation tax return in respect of their Irish branch operations; however, the return does not require them to provide their country of residence for tax purposes.

While non-resident companies within the charge to Irish corporation tax are not required to indicate their country of residence in their annual corporation tax return, section 882 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (which was introduced in Finance Act 1999) requires companies incorporated in the State to provide certain particulars to Revenue within 30 days of commenc-

ing to carry on a business. Particulars to be provided include the company's name, registered address, place of business, date of commencement of the business and, in the case of a company not resident in the State, the name of the territory in which it is tax resident. The purpose of this provision is to ensure that newly incorporated companies coming within the charge to Irish corporation tax are registered with Revenue for tax purposes.

While there is no specific penalty for failing to provide a country of residence in the statement of particulars, a company that fails to deliver a statement of particulars under section 882 is liable to a penalty of €4,000, with provision for a further penalty of €60 for each day on which the failure continues after a court judgement has been obtained.

There is no requirement in Irish tax law for a company to claim or obtain authorisation of non-resident status from Revenue and statistics on the number of Irish registered non-resident companies are not separately compiled. As a result, Revenue does not have an estimate of the number of such companies, the numbers of such companies by country of residence or the number of such companies that have not declared a country of residence. Nonetheless, Revenue as part of its normal compliance activity seeks confirmation from companies from time to time as to how they are structured with a view to ensuring that all relevant corporation tax rules are correctly applied.

Public Expenditure Statistics

73. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Finance the reduction in public expenditure numbers that will be achieved in 2013 and 2014 from targeted redundancy and early retirement in his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43035/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): My Department is not in a position to provide details of the reduction in numbers as there is no targeted redundancy or early retirement scheme available to staff in my Department. Figures are not yet available for those who may retire on or before 31 August 2014 following the application of pay adjustments and related measures in accordance with the Financial Emergency Measure in the Public Interest Act, 2013 and the Haddington Road Agreement.

Student Grant Scheme Appeals

74. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will confirm that an appeal to Student Universal Support Ireland has been received in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Monaghan; and when he expects a decision to issue on same. [42618/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Officials in my Department have confirmed with Student Universal Support Ireland that in the case of the student referred to by the Deputy, her student grant application was appealed to the appeals officer in SUSI on 17 September, 2013 and the student will be notified directly by SUSI of the outcome.

Where an appeal is turned down in writing by SUSI and the applicant remains of the view that the scheme has not been interpreted correctly in his or her case, an appeal form outlining the position may be submitted by the applicant to the independent Student Grants Appeals Board. The relevant appeal form is available to download from www.studentfinance.ie.

Site Acquisitions

75. **Deputy Olivia Mitchell** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding negotiations between his Department and a school (details supplied) in Dublin 14 regarding the donation of a site beside the school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42632/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I am pleased to advise that the legal agreement associated with the donation of the site referred to by the Deputy was concluded earlier this year.

School Transport Eligibility

76. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason a student (details supplied) in County Kildare who was travelling on a school bus to Naas from their home in Kildare until recently can not use this bus now, if this decision may be reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42636/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): Under the terms of the Post Primary School Transport Scheme, children are eligible for transport where they reside not less than 4.8 kms from, and are attending, their nearest education centre as determined by the Department/Bus Éireann, having regard to ethos and language.

Bus Éireann is responsible for the planning and timetabling of school transport routes. Bus Éireann endeavours, within available resources, to ensure that each eligible child has a reasonable level of school transport service in the context of the Scheme nationally.

Where practicable, and subject to considerations of cost and logistics, routes are planned to avoid an eligible child having to travel more than 3.2 kms to or from a pick up/set down point or to have travel and waiting times in excess of 2.5 hours per day. Routes are planned on the basis of the locations of children who are eligible for school transport only.

A number of dedicated school transport services are provided to cater for eligible children attending Gaelcholáiste Chill Dara. The service referred to by the Deputy caters for pupils residing in a distinct locality and is currently operating to capacity. The child referred to is eligible for school transport and has been issued with a ticket for the 2013/14 school year on a newly established service. Bus Éireann has advised that the pupil resides 1.4 km from the nearest pick up point of this service and this is deemed to be a reasonable level of service and within guidelines.

Schools Building Projects Applications

77. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will examine the application by Kerry Education Service for the provision of a new school building for a school (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42640/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department officials met with the ETB in August last in relation to a capital project for the school concerned. The next step is to determine the suitability of the greenfield site, identified by the ETB, for development and this process is on-going. Tralee has not been identified as an area of significant demographic growth. In that context, a project for the school has not

been included in the current 5 year plan. My Department's over-riding objective is to ensure that every child has access to a physical school place and that our school system is in a position to cope with increasing pupil numbers. To ensure that this is achieved, the delivery of major school projects to meet significant demographic demands nationally will be the main focus for capital investment in schools in the coming years. The 5 Year Construction Plan that I announced in March 2012 is focused on meeting this demand.

Given the need to meet this demographic growth within the limited funding available, it is not possible to indicate at this point when a building project for the school will be progressed. However, should the greenfield site prove suitable for development, the site acquisition could progress in the context of available funding.

Special Educational Needs Staff Remuneration

78. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will end the policy of wage curtailment, which has meant that the wages of many special needs assistants in primary schools have been reduced due to new contracts based on a 32 hour week; and if he will implement clear and direct procedures for solving disputes over wages. [42650/13]

79. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the 32 hour benchmark currently used is an appropriate mechanism for determining the salaries of special needs assistants in the majority of schools. [42651/13]

81. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will end the ambiguity faced by special needs assistants in dealing with three different entities when seeking redress regarding contract disputes; and if he will implement clear and direct procedures for resolving disputes over the payment of wages. [42653/13]

82. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills in the case where it is determined that his Department has overpaid special needs assistants, if he will ensure there is an amnesty for those in receipt of such payments while a fairer and more equitable contract system is implemented. [42654/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I propose to take Questions Nos. 78, 79, 81 and 82 together.

All of these questions relate to Special Needs Assistants (SNAs). In relation to SNA contracts, the position is that the standard contract for SNAs was agreed by this Department, the Trade Unions (IMPACT and SIPTU) representing SNAs and the Management Bodies in 2005. This standard contract has not been amended recently nor are there any current plans to amend the standard SNA contract.

In that context, the position on working hours for SNAs is that there are no nationally set working hours for full-time SNAs. The working week for SNAs is defined in paragraph 2.5 of their contract as follows: "You will be required to work normal classroom hours including class break periods and in addition to attend before and after school in order to help with the preparation and tidying up of classrooms, reception and dispersal of children etc. The hours of work will normally be from [xxxx] to [xxxx] daily during term time."

This standard contract has been designed to be flexible to cater for the different spectrum of working hours across all the various schools including primary, post-primary and special schools. No set hours were agreed but instead, full-time SNAs are expected to work for the normal school hours in the school that they are working in, and in addition to be available for a

period of time before and after school in order to help with reception and dispersal of children and preparation and tidying up of classrooms etc. These times are set locally by the school management and will vary from school to school depending on the requirements of the school.

Furthermore, all SNAs were required to be available for a number of days at the start and finish of each school term not exceeding 12 in total. Under the Croke Park Agreement it was agreed to introduce greater flexibility to the use of these 12 days. These 12 days now equate to 72 hours (pro-rata for part-time SNAs) to be used by schools as an additional bank of hours to be utilised and delivered outside of normal school opening hours and/or the normal school year. SNAs who are employed in a part-time capacity are paid a pro-rata amount dependent upon their level of hours of employment. Part-time SNAs are paid on the agreed divisor rate for pay purposes for part-time SNAs which is 32 hours.

In relation to the suggestion that the agreed working hours/working week for an SNA should be altered and-or that there is a policy of wage curtailment being pursued in respect of SNAs the position is as follows. The Deputy will be aware that a new set of proposals for a public service agreement were put forward by the Labour Relations Commission which now form the Public Service Stability Agreement 2013-2016 (the Haddington Road Agreement). Two of the key aspects of this Agreement relate to working hours for all public servants and remuneration, increments and related balancing measures. The measures in respect of remuneration, increments and related balancing measures for SNAs were given effect in DES Circular 34/2013 which issued on 27 June 2013 and which is available on the Department's website at the following address: http://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0034_2013.pdf

The specific text of the Haddington Road Agreement relating to working hours for SNAs is as follows:

SPECIAL NEEDS ASSISTANTS Hours Under the terms of the Public Service Agreement 2010-2014, discussions took place that led to agreement on changed attendance arrangements for Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) that give schools the option of an additional two hours working time per week from each Special Needs Assistant. Under the terms of this Agreement on increased working hours in the Public Service, the available requirements in schools for additional hours for SNAs is quite limited. Given issues such as the duration of the school day and operation hours, and the specific availability of individual SNAs the details of the utilisation of any additional requirements should be the subject of further discussions. These new attendance arrangements, allied to the provisions outlined in the above paragraph should be the subject of a review by the LRC in advance of the 2013/2014 school year, involving the Department of Education and Skills and IMPACT/SIPTU, in order to assess if the additional hours are being utilised in the most effective and appropriate manner and in order to achieve agreement on any changes deemed necessary in terms of the arrangement agreed for teachers. This will constitute the liability on Special Needs Assistants in respect of working hours for the purposes of this extension to the Public Service Agreement.

As the LRC proposals which formed the Haddington Road Agreement are part of a wider public-sector pay agreement that represent compromises by both employers and unions, I do not have the ability to alter the terms of that agreement. If an individual SNA has a dispute over their salary, and if they are a Department paid SNA, then in the first instance they should raise the matter directly with the NTS Payroll section of my Department who have responsibility for the payment of SNAs on the Departmental payroll. An SNA employed by an Education and Training Board should raise the matter directly with their own employer.

In respect of the point made regarding overpayments of salary the position is that such overpayments occur for numerous reasons and the recoupment of overpayments is dealt with in line with my Department's published policy and procedures for dealing with Overpayments of Salary (DES circular 15/04 which is available on the Department's website at the following address http://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/pay15_04.pdf). The occurrence of overpayments is avoidable and with co-operation, the inconvenience caused to staff members in such situations can be alleviated. It is acknowledged that it may not always be possible for school management-staff members to provide the Department with the required written notification in advance. In that instance, it should be possible to contact the Department directly - by phone or e-mail; thereby lessening the risk of the staff member concerned being overpaid.

Special Educational Needs Staff Remuneration

80. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will examine the contracts of special needs assistants whose pay has been reduced due to their post now being considered a percentage of a full post of 32 hours per week; and if he will initiate reforms to end this practice. [42652/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I wish to advise the Deputy that the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible, through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs), for processing applications from schools for special educational needs supports including Special Needs Assistant (SNA) support, to support children with special educational needs. The NCSE operates within my Department's established criteria for the allocation of such supports and the staffing resources available to my Department. It is important to note that SNA allocations are not permanent, as the level of SNA support allocated to a school may be increased or decreased as pupils who qualify for SNA support enrol or leave a school. They are also decreased where a child's care needs may have diminished over time.

Special need assistants are employed by the managerial authorities of the individual primary and second level schools or by Education and Training Boards (ETBs). The recruitment and deployment of SNAs within schools are matters for the individual Principal-Board of Management. The Board is the SNA's employer and the terms of employment are subject to the conditions of the contract of employment. The exact hours of work will normally be specified by the Board of Management in the SNAs contract of employment and may vary from school to school depending on the requirements of the school. Where a Board or ETB are obliged to reduce the hours of an existing SNA, the conditions governing that are currently set out in Departmental Circulars 58/06 and 59/06. SNAs who are employed in a part-time capacity are paid on the agreed divisor rate for pay purposes for part-time SNAs which is 32 hours.

Questions Nos. 81 and 82 answered with Question No. 78.

Stádas Scoile Faoi Mhíbhuntáiste

83. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Pearse Doherty** den Aire Oideachais agus Scileanna an ndéanfaidh sé cinnte de go mbronnann an Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna stádas DEIS, atá ag bun-scoileanna sa cheantar céanna, ar Phobalscoil Ghaoth Dobhair gan a thuilleadh moille, sa dóigh is go mbeidh rogha ag mic léinn Ghaeltachta dara leibhéal ó Rann na Feirste freastal ar Phobalscoil na Rosann, meánscoil ag a bhfuil stádas DEIS ach a mhúineann trí Bhéarla, nó ar mhé-

anscoil lán-Ghaeilge i nGaoth Dobhair; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [42659/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Bunaíodh an próiseas aitheantais do bhunscoileanna ar anailís a rinne an tIonad Taighde Oideachais (ERC) ar thorthaí suirbhé ar bhunscoileanna. Aithníodh san anailís na hathróna socheacnamaíocha is fearr, i dtéannta a chéile, mar fhaistíneoirí ar ghnóthachtáil, agus baineadh úsáid as na hathróna sin chun bunscoileanna a aithint le bheith páirteach i gclár DEIS. I gcás iar-bhunscoileanna, chuir mo Roinn sonraí éagsúla oideachais agus socheacnamaíocha ar fáil don ERC ó bhunachar sonraí na ndaltaí iar-bhunscoileanna agus ó bhunachar sonraí Choimisiún na Scrúduithe Stáit. Níor roghnaíodh Pobalscoil Ghaoth Dobhair le bheith páirteach i gclár DEIS toisc nár chomhlíon sí na critéir.

Ina theannta sin, in achomharc a rinne an scoil chuig foras neamhspleách athbhreithnithe sa bhliain 2006, deimhníodh nár leor leibhéal míbhuntáiste na scoile chun cáiliú don chlár. Tá sé mar phríomh-thosaíocht ag an Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna acmhainí a chur in ord tosaíochta agus a dhíriú i scoileanna ina bhfuil na leibhéil mhíbhuntáiste oideachais is dlúithe. Dúshlán suntasach atá ann, mar thoradh ar an dtimpeallacht eacnamúil atá ann faoi láthair agus an aidhm chun caiteachas poiblí a laghdú. Cuireann sé seo srian freisin ar an gcumas le breisiú ar bith sa chlár DEIS, roghnú scoileanna breise san áireamh.

Third Level Fees

84. **Deputy Arthur Spring** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a person (details supplied) in County Kerry qualifies as a child dependent on their parent's claim, and therefore entitled for free fees for third level based on the fact that they are aged 22 years and enrolled in full-time education, despite the fact that they are just short of meeting the three years residency criteria. [42677/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Under the terms of my Department's Free Fee Schemes the Exchequer meets the cost of tuition fees in respect of eligible students who are pursuing full-time undergraduate courses of study which are a minimum of two years duration in an approved higher education institution. The main conditions of the scheme are that students must be first-time undergraduates, hold *inter alia* EU/EEA/Swiss nationality in their own right, and have been ordinarily resident in an EU/EEA/Swiss state for at least three of the five years preceding their entry to an approved third level course. It is the student's own nationality and residency in the state that determines eligibility under the schemes. The Department of Justice and Equality adjudicates on a person's entitlement to remain in the State and on the stamp that is awarded where permission to remain is sanctioned. A 'stamp 4' does not of itself convey any entitlement to public services. Higher education institutions determine the entitlements of students to free fees based on meeting the prescribed conditions of the Schemes and in cases where students do not qualify for free fees it is a matter for the institutions, as autonomous bodies, to determine the rate of fee to apply.

Education and Training Provision

85. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills with regard to the closure of Abbey College in August 2011 and the fact that staff members were awarded a judgment for outstanding wages by both the LRC and EAT and yet remain unpaid, the measures in place to ensure the directors of this company cannot open another educational facility. [42678/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Quality and Qualifications

Ireland (QQI) has assumed the award-making function of both FETAC, which made awards for programmes provided by Abbey College, and HETAC. Under the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act, 2012, providers which seek access to the awards of QQI must first have their procedures for quality assurance agreed by QQI.

QQI is introducing a new process for providers seeking to agree their quality assurance procedures with QQI. As part of this process, QQI will require applicants to provide a statutory declaration in which all owners and/or influential persons associated with the applicant will have to respond to a number of questions including whether they have been adjudicated bankrupt, whether they have made a composition or arrangement with creditors, whether they have been sentenced to a term of imprisonment, whether they have been convicted of an indictable offence, whether they have been convicted of an offence involving fraud or dishonesty, or whether they have been the subject of an order under section 160 of the Companies Act 1990.

Therefore the past history of directors and influential persons associated with a particular provider will be taken into account when deciding whether or not that provider should be allowed to apply for validation of programmes by QQI. This also applies to providers of English language training which seek ACELS recognition.

Institutes of Technology Issues

86. **Deputy Ann Phelan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason the outcome figure for an institute of technology (details supplied) in respect of research and development income is significantly lower than the other third level institutions here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42682/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The Irish higher education system must deliver against multiple objectives. A System Performance Framework has been published which outlines key system objectives and indicators for the system as a whole. No single institution can hope to deliver comprehensively against all these objectives. Instead, the National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 supports the development of a system of diverse institutions, with each institution delivering in different ways against these overarching objectives.

The development of research capacity is a key objective for the system overall, but it is not expected that each higher education institution will be research intensive. Quality research requires a level of critical mass of activity and initiatives underway as part of the recently announced plans for the reconfiguration of the sector, such as the development of regional clusters and the establishment of technological universities, will enable the further development of research capabilities across the system.

Schools Building Projects Status

87. **Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding a school (details supplied) in County Dublin and the proposed move to a vacant building in Loughlinstown; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42685/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I wish to advise the Deputy that it is my Department's intention to provide improved accommodation for the school to which he refers. It is intended that the school will be accommodated in a school building currently occupied temporarily by a special school pending the construction of a permanent school

building for the latter. This permanent building is listed on the Five Year Construction Plan with a view to proceeding to construction in 2014/15. The building project for the special school is progressing as quickly as possible and is at an advanced stage of the architectural planning process.

For the Deputy's information, in July 2010, the school to which she refers was approved funding of over €164,000 to upgrade existing services and accommodation which will have assisted with improving the school's current environment.

Broadband Services Provision

88. **Deputy Dominic Hannigan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a school (details supplied) may expect to have broadband installed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42690/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Under the Schools Broadband Access Programme the Department provides for the supply of internet connectivity for all recognised primary schools. All contracts under the Schools Broadband Access Programme were re-tendered last year under a public procurement competition. As a result of this the number of service providers has been expanded from 6 to 13 with the aim of ensuring that satisfactory solutions would be awarded to schools.

Oristown National School was re-tendered for in a mini-competition in August this year to see if a solution was available after their previous connection broke down. The contract for this school has been awarded to RippleCom and the necessary installation arrangements are currently in train. Contact is being made with the school by the provider.

Pupil-Teacher Ratio

89. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding class sizes in County Wicklow (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42759/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The criteria used for the allocation of teachers to schools is published annually on the Department's website. The key factor for determining the level of staffing resources provided at individual school level is the staffing schedule for the relevant school year and pupil enrolments on the previous 30 September. The staffing schedule operates in a clear and transparent manner and treats all similar types of schools equally irrespective of location. The configuration of classes and the deployment of classroom teachers are done at local school level. The staffing arrangements for schools for the current school year, 2013/14 are set out in Department Circular 0013/2013 which is available on the website. My Department publishes annual statistics on class size data for each school. The most recent statistics are for the 2012/13 school year. The national average class size is 24.7 pupils. However, with over 20,800 classes in over 3,100 primary schools throughout the country there will always be variations in class sizes at individual school level. My Department's guidance to local school management is that such variations should be kept to the minimum.

Apprenticeship Programmes

90. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the total num-

ber of apprenticeships made available throughout the country in each of the past five years and to date in 2013; the extent to which this has met the demand; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42769/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I am informed that the number of apprentices registered by employers in the past 5 years, as well as the total apprentice population for each year is as follows:

Year	Registrations	Apprenticeship population
2008	3,765	26,170
2009	1,535	21,407
2010	1,204	14,801
2011	1,307	13,001
2012	1,434	8,862
2013	1,266 (year to date)	7,725 (year to date)

The above figures also include the relevant data for this year to date. I understand that the equivalent year to date figure for apprentice registrations for 2012 was 1,010 which indicates a 25% increase in 2013.

Under the Action Plan for Jobs my Department has commissioned a review of the Apprenticeship Programme. The consultative phase of the Review has invited submissions from stakeholders in Apprenticeship, and the review will address three key themes:

Consideration of the strengths and weaknesses of the current model of apprenticeship and what improvements can be made to its current structure.

An examination of the alternative methods of work-based training in Ireland.

Consideration of the structural mechanisms, and criteria, under which collaboration with industry/employers can be pursued into the future, either through improved, alternative or complementary models of work-based training.

It is expected that the group leading the review will complete its work before the end of the year.

Education Policy

91. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a structure will be put in place to facilitate immediate action in partnership with Pobal and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs to ensure adequate funding for island preschools; if the Department has comprehensive island-specific policies on student and teacher ratios at the three levels of schooling (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42775/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): As the Deputy may be aware, the vast majority of support for child care, including preschool education, is not provided by my Department, but is provided by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. Funding for island preschools is a matter for that Department.

In my Department, teacher allocations at primary and post-primary level are approved annually in accordance with established rules based on recognised pupil enrolment. The staffing

arrangements at primary level include provision for island schools to retain the second or third classroom teaching post where the school is the only primary school remaining on the island. This provision means that such posts are retained on a lower pupil threshold than what applies in all other primary schools. The staffing arrangements at post-primary level include an additional teaching post for island schools.

The detailed staffing arrangements for schools, including island schools, are in the public domain and are published on my Department's website.

Departmental Staff Retirements

92. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reduction in public expenditure numbers that will be achieved in 2013 and 2014 from targeted redundancy and early retirement in his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43033/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The Government announced a targeted voluntary redundancy package earlier this year which is initially to be rolled out in three areas including specific parts of the Education Sector. Officials of my Department are currently liaising with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform with a view to finalising arrangements for the roll out of a targeted scheme for the Sector.

Although there is no voluntary redundancy scheme currently on offer to employees of the Department of Education and skills 5 staff have availed of the early retirement option in 2013, with no further applications expected this year. To date, only 1 application for early retirement has been made by a staff member of my Department in respect of 2014. However, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform Circular 08/2013 which allows for officers retiring before 31st August, 2014, to have their superannuation benefits calculated by reference to the pay scales applying on 30th June, 2013, may lead to an increase in applications before the end of August 2014.

Public Procurement Contracts Tenders

93. **Deputy Dominic Hannigan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the actions he is taking to make it easier and cheaper for small and medium enterprises to apply for Government tenders; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42689/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): I am aware that public procurement can be an important source of business for Irish small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Current guidelines (Circular 10/10) issued by my Department require public bodies to promote participation of SMEs in the award of public contracts. The guidance also highlights practices that are to be avoided because they can unjustifiably hinder small businesses in competing for public contracts. The key provisions of the guidance include:

- supplies and general services contracts with an estimated value of €25,000 or more to be advertised on the www.etenders.gov.ie website;

- less use of "restrictive" tendering procedures and greater use of "open" tendering;

- ensuring that the levels set by contracting authorities for suitability criteria are justified and proportionate to the needs of the contract; and

- sub-dividing larger requirements into lots where this is practical and can be done without

compromising efficiency and value for money.

My Department is keen to streamline procurement processes - consistent with its value for money, legal, transparency and probity objectives. In order to reduce the costs involved in participating or conducting the procurement process, the National Procurement Service as part of the new Office of Government Procurement is promoting standardisation and simplification of the public procurement function. It has published a suite of model tendering and contract documents which will help both businesses and buyers to reduce administrative costs.

In addition my Department has developed contracts for Public Works and Construction-Related Services that give greater cost certainty at tender stage, for capital projects. The construction reform initiative has yielded substantial savings in capital procurement.

In order to encourage greater SME participation the National Procurement Service, over the past three years, has conducted a targeted programme of education for suppliers who wish to learn more about doing business with the Irish Public Service. This programme consists of seminars, workshops and large scale 'meet the buyer' events hosted nationwide. To date the NPS has facilitated workshops and presented at seminars to over 4,500 SMEs nationwide. Parallel with these events the NPS also works closely with business representative bodies such as ISME and IBEC to provide briefings for their members.

Public Sector Staff Increment Payments

94. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the gross value of all increments to be paid to civil and public servants in 2014, and the percentage average increase-decrease in salaries in 2014 factoring in increments and the cuts imposed as part of the Haddington Road agreement. [42611/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The detailed information sought by the Deputy is not available to my Department. Impact on salaries would vary at the level of the individual having regard to the pay reductions for those on salaries above €65,000, the freezing or pausing of increments to those that may be eligible for an increment in 2014 and the amount of overtime or other non core salary earned. The reductions in the total pay bill of public servants arising from the Haddington Road Agreement and the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2013 will be reflected in the public service pay estimates for 2014 which will be determined as part of Budget 2014.

Public Sector Reform Implementation

95. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform in the context of the objectives set out by his Department in terms of the curtailment of public expenditure and reform when he took up office two and a half years ago, the extent to which he has succeeded in meeting those objectives with particular reference to the benefit and stabilisation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42741/13]

97. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which he expects to be in a position to meet in full all the targets set and agreed by the troika for the current year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42743/13]

98. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the net benefits to date to the Exchequer in terms of cost reductions achieved in line with the troika

agreement in general; the extent to which these are in line with targets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42744/13]

99. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which he expects to be in a position to achieve budgetary curtailments required in the coming year without impacting on staffing levels or quality of service throughout the public sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42745/13]

101. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the degree to which he and his Department has evaluated the likely benefits to the economy arising from achievements in expenditure strategy over the past two years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42747/13]

102. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which targets set for each Government Department in terms of public expenditure and reform have been met in full in each of the past three years to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42748/13]

105. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which he and his Department have identified cost overruns or the potential for such throughout various Government Departments; the extent to which it has been found possible to take corrective action; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42751/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 95, 97 to 99, inclusive, 101, 102 and 105 together.

Since this Government was established in 2011, a medium-term expenditure management process began with a Comprehensive Review of Expenditure exercise. This exercise was carried out by all Departments in order to identify ways of reducing expenditure in line with commitments under the Joint EU/IMF Programme of Financial Support for Ireland, while minimising the impact on service delivery.

Following on from this, the Ministerial expenditure ceilings for 2012 - 2014 were introduced on an administrative basis in the Comprehensive Expenditure Report, published in December 2011. The CRE exercise forms the foundation of these ceilings and is the basis for all subsequent decisions on expenditure. A new Comprehensive Review of Expenditure exercise will be carried out early next year.

The Expenditure Report 2013 was published on 5 December 2012 and included further well-specified expenditure savings measures across every area of Government spending. The Government policy on Budget 2014 measures is currently being finalised and the Budget announcement will be made on the 15th of October 2013.

The EU-IMF Programme of Financial Support is subject to policy conditionality which is set out in programme documents - the Memorandum of Understanding on Specific Economic Policy Conditionality (MOU), the Memorandum of Economic and Financial Policies (MEFP) and the Technical Memorandum of Understanding. The conditionality in these documents is subject to continuing assessment by the Irish Authorities and the EU, IMF, ECB (the Troika) to ensure the broad programme objectives are met. Such assessment is undertaken at the quarterly reviews. Each update to the MoU can include the protraction or revisions to existing commitments along with new commitments.

The Irish Government's commitment to the EU/IMF Programme of Financial Support remains firm as is clearly illustrated by our continued strong record in implementing the agreed policy frameworks and measures while meeting all quantitative targets. We are in the final

year of the EU-IMF Programme of Financial Support and having successfully concluded the eleventh review mission of our EU-IMF Programme the data released in the Exchequer Statement on 2 October indicates that the Exchequer primary deficit target was met for the twelfth consecutive quarter. In line with each of the previous quarterly reviews, Ireland has met all quantitative fiscal targets and our continued strong programme implementation has been recognised by the Troika.

Question No. 96 answered with Question No. 30.

Questions Nos. 97 to 99, inclusive, answered with Question No. 95.

Public Expenditure Statistics

100. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which the national pay bill has been stabilised or reduced since he took up office; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42746/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): I would refer the Deputy to the *Analysis of Exchequer Pay and Pensions Bill 2007-2012*, published by my Department. This publication presents a detailed breakdown of both gross and net pay and pension expenditure in aggregate terms, by sector and by individual Vote and is available on my Department's website at www.per.gov.ie under the Reports tab.

In addition the Deputy will be aware, that Ireland is committed to reducing its general government deficit to less than 3% by 2015. If the public service pay and pensions bill at 36% of spending is to make a proportionate contribution to the necessary additional expenditure reduction currently identified as necessary for the next 3 years based on current economic forecasts, it requires a further reduction of some €1 billion in the cost of the pay and pensions bill with €300 million of that saving to be delivered in 2013. On this basis the Government through public service employers entered into discussions with public service unions to achieve agreement on the necessary reductions. They negotiated a difficult and complex set of proposals under the Haddington Road Agreement which will deliver the necessary €1bn saving in the public service pay and pensions bill by 2015 while ameliorating the impacts for public service staff on low and middle incomes to the greatest extent possible.

Questions Nos. 101 and 102 answered with Question No. 95.

Public Sector Staff Data

103. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which staffing levels throughout the public sector are in line with targets in terms of savings and expenditure but at the same time sufficient to retain and maintain quality of service throughout the sectors; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42749/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The Government has set ambitious targets for reducing numbers in the public service. Underpinned by the additional hours and new workplace flexibilities contained in Haddington Road and supported by reform initiatives such as shared services and outsourcing the Government expects a leaner, more effective public service into the future.

The transition to this improved state is challenging. Shedding staff numbers, maintaining service levels and rolling out service delivery reform is difficult; but it is necessary.

For the last full recorded year, 2012, the reduction in public service numbers was on target overall. So far, progress in 2013 is less than required but Ministers and their departments know what they are required to do.

My Department is supporting a range of reform options across the system to help sectoral managers achieve the type of organisational restructuring and changes to service delivery models required to protect the quality of the public service, especially on the frontline, as it reduces in size.

Exchequer Savings

104. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which his Department has succeeded in making savings through insurance cost reductions and public procurement in each of the past two years to date; the extent to which he expects to be in a position to achieve further savings in these areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42750/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): Departments and Offices should make every effort to contain and reduce all administrative costs including both insurance and procurement costs. This approach unpins the current programme of reform of public procurement is one of the major projects of key strategic importance in the Government's Public Service Reform Plan. Procurement of supplies and services accounts for around €9 billion of current spending by the State per annum. This represents a very significant portion of overall spending and it is, therefore, essential that the Public Service achieves maximum value for money and operational efficiency in its approach to public procurement.

In this regard, an external review of the central procurement function was commissioned by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. The report of the review, which was published in late last year, found that significant savings can be achieved through the implementation of a transformational change to the central procurement model. The report estimates that implementation of its recommendations, over a three-year period, could yield potential annual savings in the range of €249 million to €637 million on an addressable spend of €7 billion, depending on the approach taken.

In saving over the last two years the National Procurement Service as part of the newly formed Office of Government Procurement has reported procurement savings to the end of 2012 under its frameworks of €93.1m, comprising of €7.5m in 2010, €46.5m in 2011 and a further €39.1m for 2012, which include administrative savings. I would point out that further work is underway within the newly established Office of Government Procurement to develop a more accurate methodology to measure savings.

In relation to plans for further reform of public procurement, the review also found that significant savings can be achieved through the implementation of a transformational change to the central procurement model. In December 2012, arising out of recommendations in the review of the central procurement function the Minister announced the appointment of a Chief Procurement Officer to lead a key element of the Government's Public Service Reform agenda. The new approach to public procurement will involve:

- integrating procurement policy, strategy and sourcing in one office;
- strengthening spend analytics and data management;
- much greater aggregation of purchasing across public bodies to achieve better value for

money;

- examining the specifications set out for goods and services;
- evaluating demand levels to assess how demand and volume can be reduced; and
- strengthening supplier and category management.

These reforms will lead to reductions in the cost of goods and services; better procurement services at lower cost; introduction of technical standardisation; greater attention to contract management and better problem resolution; greater levels of professionalism among staff responsible for procurement; and better performance management of the central procurement function.

Question No. 105 answered with Question No. 95.

Sale of State Assets

106. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which the disposal of State assets remains included in options for consideration by his Department; if such options are likely to be used as a last resort; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42752/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The scope and content of the Government's State Assets Disposal Programme was agreed by Government in February 2012. No additional State assets are under consideration for inclusion in the State Assets Disposal Programme at this time.

Job Creation Data

107. **Deputy Derek Nolan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if he will provide, in tabular form, a county breakdown of the number of jobs created by State agencies such as the Industrial Development Agency and Enterprise Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42613/13]

108. **Deputy Derek Nolan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if he will provide, in tabular form, a breakdown of the number of jobs created by State agencies such as the Industrial Development Agency and Enterprise Ireland in Galway city; if he will also provide the numbers for the constituency of Galway West; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42614/13]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 107 and 108 together.

The Forfás Annual Employment Survey reports on job gains and losses in companies that are supported by the enterprise development agencies. Details of the number of full time jobs created in each year from 2008 to 2012 in IDA and Enterprise Ireland client companies is set out on a county by county basis in the following tabular statements.

Data is compiled on an annualized basis and is aggregated at county level. The information is provided by companies on a confidential basis for statistical purposes only. It is therefore not possible to provide information for individual locations in a particular county.

I am pleased to say that 2012 was a particularly good year for job creation in Agency supported companies, with IDA client companies creating a total of 12,722 gross new full time jobs and Enterprise Ireland client companies creating a total of 12,861 gross new full time jobs.

Table 1 - Table showing the number of new jobs created on a county by county basis by Enterprise Ireland supported companies in each of the years from 2008 to 2012

County	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Carlow	223	40	225	253	152
Cavan	335	89	196	369	374
Clare	86	50	202	94	133
Cork	1,320	1,143	1,160	1,997	1,663
Donegal	270	164	218	301	180
Dublin	4,704	3,864	4,535	3,938	4,097
Galway	532	386	617	855	572
Kerry	260	172	142	232	194
Kildare	351	476	295	1,082	534
Kilkenny	176	74	140	150	320
Laois	93	23	76	158	76
Leitrim	44	11	31	46	54
Limerick	498	344	418	289	684
Longford	141	120	74	86	116
Louth	472	205	255	389	299
Mayo	289	203	144	716	197
Meath	325	350	301	362	615
Monaghan	341	74	252	391	294
Offaly	689	100	266	173	139
Roscommon	39	37	46	108	29
Sligo	87	74	131	140	247
Tipperary North	91	23	161	127	49
Tipperary South	321	56	80	123	81
Waterford	492	317	431	909	692
Westmeath	379	92	154	340	275
Wexford	368	310	222	191	385
Wicklow	265	91	215	204	410

Table 2 - Table showing the number of new jobs created on a county by county basis by IDA Ireland supported companies in each of the years from 2008 to 2012

County	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Carlow	74	49	87	75	116
Cavan	32	18	52	3	43
Clare	140	123	30	27	37
Cork	2,116	1,108	1,393	1,990	1,979

County	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Donegal	67	63	152	271	186
Dublin	4,351	2,284	5,037	6,864	6,389
Galway	636	442	789	1,047	859
Kerry	86	25	50	163	74
Kildare	113	30	1,228	398	176
Kilkenny	1	0	17	33	180
Laois	0	17	10	3	2
Leitrim	35	5	65	7	1
Limerick	286	172	163	233	400
Longford	30	8	4	0	24
Louth	75	33	43	109	386
Mayo	132	97	183	69	126
Meath	132	30	38	53	68
Monaghan	15	19	28	0	3
Offaly	29	22	25	31	31
Roscommon	41	0	12	51	53
Sligo	103	54	53	93	149
Tipperary North	13	0	14	22	0
Tipperary South	262	252	56	84	10
Waterford	176	112	146	72	75
Westmeath	134	231	128	194	252
Wexford	120	14	174	51	111
Wicklow	53	39	13	66	60

Small and Medium Enterprises Supports

109. **Deputy Derek Nolan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if he will provide a county breakdown, in tabular form, of the number of businesses which have used State supports such as the microfinance fund and the credit guarantee scheme. [42615/13]

110. **Deputy Derek Nolan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if he will provide a county breakdown in tabular form of the number of businesses in Galway West which have used State supports for Irish businesses such as the micro-finance fund and the credit guarantee scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42616/13]

111. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the take-up of the partial loan guarantee scheme and microenterprise loan scheme for each year that it has been in operation. [42621/13]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 109 to 111, inclusive, together.

Quarterly progress reports on the Microenterprise Loan Fund and the SME Credit Guarantee Scheme are published on my Department's website www.enterprise.gov.ie. The progress report detailing the analysis and performance of both Schemes for the quarterly period ending 30th June 2013 is available on my Department's website. I intend to publish the next progress

reports to end September 2013 by mid-October, when the reports have been finalised.

Credit Guarantee Scheme Review

112. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the findings and recommendations of the external review of the partial loan guarantee scheme; and if he will make public the full review. [42622/13]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): I gave a commitment to review the Credit Guarantee Scheme (CGS) after 12 months of operation. The Scheme has been operational since 24 October 2012. As at 4th October there were 69 live CGS facilities resulting in €9.7m being sanctioned through the Scheme by the participating lenders resulting in 433 new jobs being created and 139 jobs maintained.

As take-up continued to be slow, the Scheme was recently independently reviewed with a view to identifying the reasons for this and recommending changes to the Scheme design. The Review included detailed consultations with all key stakeholders. A Steering Group, chaired by my Department, is currently assessing the expert Review and will shortly report back to me outlining what action needs to be taken to amend the Scheme. I intend to publish the Review once this assessment is complete.

Microenterprise Loan Fund Applications

113. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation in view of the low levels of take up of the microenterprise loan scheme, if he will consider bringing forward the fundamental review of the programme. [42623/13]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Deputy will be aware that Microfinance Ireland (MFI) began operations in October 2012 and from the outset, I have emphasised that the potential utilisation figures used were estimated and that the exact requirements of the Scheme are demand led.

My Department and the Microenterprise Loan Fund operator, MFI have committed significant time and resources to the establishment and operation of this Fund. While my officials engage with MFI on an on-going basis in how the Fund is being delivered, I intend to ensure that it is reviewed at an early date to determine what actions might be taken to ensure the use of the Fund is maximised.

Overall demand for credit for microenterprises remains low at just 36%, according to the most recent SME Credit Demand Survey prepared for the Department of Finance (Red C October 2012 to March 2013), although this is up from 30% for the same period 12 months previously (Mazars October 2011 to March 2012).

Quarterly progress reports on the Microenterprise Loan Fund are published on my Department's website www.enterprise.gov.ie. The progress report detailing the analysis and performance for the quarterly period ending 30 June 2013 is available on my Department's website. I intend to publish the next progress report to end 30 September 2013 by mid-October. The Report is currently being finalised.

Microenterprise Loan Fund Expenditure

114. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the set up costs and ongoing administrative costs per year associated with the microenterprise loan scheme. [42624/13]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): Details of the set-up costs of Microfinance Ireland (MFI) were set out in MFI's accounts for the period ended 31 December 2012. The annual report and accounts for 2012 were laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas in July 2013.

The accounts reported that during the period to 31 December 2012, the company incurred costs of €278,000, which were of an exceptional nature, but which were in furtherance of the ordinary activities of the company. These exceptional costs were incurred by Social Finance Foundation (SFF, the parent company of MFI) on behalf of the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation and included the following: legal Costs of €113,000 prior to incorporation and also relating to the setup of MFI; projects Costs of €165,000 prior to incorporation and also relating to the setup of MFI. These costs, totalling €278,000, have now been reimbursed by Microfinance Ireland to SFF.

Separately, I have been advised by MFI that the annual administration costs for MFI for the year to December 2013 are forecast to total approximately €900,000. Salaries are the largest component of MFI's annual budget and are anticipated to total less than €500,000.

Other components of the MFI budget include: approximately €200,000 for marketing costs, which are seen as essential in building awareness of the scheme among micro-enterprises and generating a pipeline of loan applications; and approximately €240,000 for overheads, such as premises, IT and employer's PRSI.

Microenterprise Loan Fund Expenditure

115. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the position regarding establishing a venture capital fund for island enterprises and microenterprises (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42778/13]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): Venture capital provides investment capital, as opposed to credit, to start-up firms and small businesses with perceived long-term growth potential. It is a very important source of funding for start-ups that do not have access to capital markets. It typically entails high risk for the investor, but it has the potential for above-average returns. Venture capital can also include managerial and technical expertise. It facilitates company growth and job creation and continues to support the creation of innovative and internationally oriented start-ups that can go fast to market and scale. These high-growth innovative Irish companies are in fast growing sectors, including ICT, life sciences, high tech manufacturing and the green economy.

Last May I announced a new call for expressions of interest under the €175 million Seed and Venture Capital Scheme 2013-2018, which will see the continuation of the Government's support for innovative Irish SMEs. The Scheme is targeting an additional €525 million in funding from the private sector, which will mean a total fund of €700 million available for investment over the lifetime of the Scheme.

The Venture Capital Funds committed to under this Scheme, as well as the Seed and Venture Capital Scheme 2007-2012, can invest in any opportunities on the Islands that fit their respective fund strategies.

Recognising that many of the Island based enterprises are microenterprises, the deputy will be aware that I established a Microenterprise Loan Fund in 2012, through Microfinance Ireland to provide microenterprises with access to loans of up to €25,000. Island microenterprises can contact their local County Enterprise Board and Microfinance Ireland concerning the operation of this Fund.

Trade Agreements

116. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the position regarding the EU-USA free trade talks; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [34270/13]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): Negotiations between the EU and the US on a Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership began formally in July, with the first round of negotiations held in Washington. The negotiations are at a very early stage, with the second round of talks, which were due to be held in Brussels this week, from 7-11 October, having been deferred at the request of the U.S. This is due to staffing and financial constraints caused by the partial government shutdown in the U.S. No alternative date has been proposed at this stage for the talks to recommence.

Science Foundation Ireland Staff

117. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if he or his officials have met with staff from Science Foundation Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40519/13]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): Both I and the Minister for Research and Innovation have regular meetings with the Director General of Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) and with other SFI staff members. In addition, a Departmental official is a SFI Board Member and attends regular Board meetings.

My officials are also in daily contact with SFI staff members, and participate in regular liaison meetings with SFI management. This regular engagement helps ensure that SFI fulfils its mission to promote, develop and assist the carrying out of oriented basic research and applied research in strategic areas of opportunity for the State.

IDA Staff

118. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if he or his Department officials have met the Industrial Development Agency recently; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40522/13]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): Since my appointment as Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, officials from my Department have had on-going regular contact with IDA Ireland, both at Board and Executive level. In addition, I have regular informal discussions with IDA Ireland officials at various events including the media events surrounding some investment announcements

These regular meetings reinforce the Government's and IDA Ireland's commitment to delivering on-going foreign direct investment.

In that context I would like to point out that 2012 saw a strong performance in the level of foreign direct investment (FDI) won by Ireland with 12,722 new jobs being created in IDA Ireland client companies and I am pleased to say that this progress has continued in 2013. Despite a poor economic background in Europe and strong opposition from locations such as the Netherlands and the U.K., mid-year results show that 70 investment projects, with the potential to create in excess of 7,000 jobs, had been won in the first 6 months of 2013.

Social Welfare Benefits Eligibility

119. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will provide a list of the social welfare benefits that do not require primary legislation to alter their eligibility rules or payment levels. [42536/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The table below lists the schemes that are set out in primary legislation and those which are non-statutory in nature.

Schemes set out in Primary Legislation*	Non-statutory Schemes
State Pension (Transition)	National Fuel Scheme
State Pension (Contributory)	Free Travel
State Pension (Non-Contributory)	Household Benefits Package
Widows, Widower's or Surviving Civil Partner's (Contributory)	Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance
Widow's Widower's or Surviving Civil Partner's Non-Contributory Pension	Community Employment Scheme
Death Benefit	Rural Social Scheme -RSS
Bereavement Grant	Tús - Community Work Placement Initiative
Widowed or Surviving Civil Partner's Grant	Back to Work Enterprise Allowance
One Parent Family Payment	Short-Term Enterprise Allowance
Child Benefit	Part Time Job Incentive Scheme
Family Income Supplement	Work Placement Programme
Guardian's payment Contributory	Jobbridge, The National Internship Scheme
Guardian's payment (Non- Contributory)	Back to Education Allowance
Maternity Benefit	Training and Development Option
Adoptive Benefit	Part-Time Education Option (PTEO)
Health and Safety Benefit	Springboard
Jobseekers Benefit	Jobsplus
Jobseeker's Allowance	The Wage Subsidy Scheme
Farm Assist	The Reasonable Accommodation Fund for the Employment of people with disabilities
Employer Job (PRSI) Incentive Scheme	The Disability Awareness Training Support Scheme
Illness Benefit	Job Initiative Scheme
Partial Capacity Benefit	Gateway
Invalidity Pension	Technical Assistance & Training Fund
Disability Allowance	Technical Employment Support Grant
Blind Pension	Activation and Family Support Programme
Carer's Benefit	School Meals – local projects scheme
Carer's Allowance	
Domiciliary Care Allowance	

Schemes set out in Primary Legislation*	Non-statutory Schemes
Respite Care Grant	
Injury Benefit	
Disablement Benefit	
Medical Care	
Treatment Benefit	
Increase for Living Alone	
Living on a Specified Island	
Rent Allowance for tenants affected by the De-Control of Rents	
Basic Supplementary Welfare Allowance and other Supplements under SWA	
Rent Supplement	
Mortgage Interest Supplement	
Exceptional Needs Payments	
Urgent Needs Payments	
School Meals – urban scheme	
Redundancy Payments Scheme	
Insolvency Payments Scheme	

* Some changes in scheme conditions may require both primary and secondary legislation. Other changes may only require secondary legislation and/or changes to administrative guidelines.

Social Welfare Benefits Applications

120. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Social Protection if a decision has been made on an application for a hearing aid grant in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42545/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): As the question relates to a separated spouse it is not possible to provide a full answer for date protection reasons as this would involve giving information in relation to one person to another.

In general, a separated spouse does not qualify as a dependent spouse and cannot claim on her husband's record.

Family Income Supplement Eligibility

121. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Social Protection the rules that apply to the family income supplement scheme in respect of fathers who do not have full custody of their children but who financially contribute to their children's upkeep and who live with them for agreed periods but not full time; and the statutory basis for these rules. [42557/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The family income supplement (FIS) provides an income support for employees with families on low earnings who otherwise might be at risk of financial poverty. It also preserves the incentive to remain in employment in circumstances where the employee might only be marginally better off than if he or she were unemployed and claiming social welfare.

Expenditure on FIS for 2012 was of the order of €224 million in respect of some 32,000 families. The estimated expenditure for 2013 is expected to be €229 million.

To qualify for payment of FIS, a person must be engaged in full-time insurable employment which is expected to last for at least 3 months and be working for a minimum of 38 hours per fortnight or 19 hours per week. Furthermore, the average family income must be below a specified amount which varies according to the number of qualified children in the family.

The applicant must also be living with or supporting his/her spouse and at least one qualified child. In the case of parents who are separated, a parent who is wholly or mainly maintaining a former spouse can qualify for FIS. This is provided for in Section 227 of the Social Welfare Consolidation Act, 2005, which sets out the definition of the family for this payment. Section 230(2) of the 2005 Act provides that only one FIS payment can be made in respect of any family and that a person included in one particular family for any period for FIS purposes shall not be regarded as a member of any other family during that period. Section 231 of the 2005 Act provides that FIS shall be payable to the member of the family who is engaged in remunerative full-time employment as an employee or, where there are two members of the family engaged in full-time employment as an employee, to the member whose assessed weekly income forms the greater part of the weekly family income. Therefore, current provisions do not allow for FIS payments to be divided between parents.

Where a question arises in determining the residence of a child for FIS purposes, an investigation of specific circumstances may be carried out.

If the Deputy wishes to have a particular case considered in further detail, she can arrange to have the details brought to the attention of my Department for consideration.

Child Benefit Eligibility

122. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Social Protection the rules that apply to the child benefit scheme in respect of fathers who do not have full custody of their children but who financially contribute to their children's upkeep and who live with them for agreed periods but not full time; and the statutory basis for these rules. [42558/13]

123. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Social Protection if it is the case that where custody and living arrangements in respect of a child are approximately evenly distributed between the parents of a child that child benefit is paid in these circumstances only to the mother; the statutory basis for these arrangements; and if she will outline the circumstances where the benefit may be split among the parents. [42559/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 122 and 123 together.

Child benefit is a universal monthly payment made to the parents/guardians of children that assists families with the cost associated with raising children. Child benefit is paid to around 606,000 families in respect of some 1.15 million children with an estimated expenditure of around €1.9 billion in 2013.

The needs of the children are the priority consideration in the payment of child benefit. Under Section 220 of the Social Welfare Consolidation Act, 2005, child benefit is payable to the person with whom a qualified child normally resides and the child will not be regarded as normally residing with more than one person. Regulations governing normal residence for child benefit purposes are contained in S.I. 142/2007 (Article 159) and they provide *inter alia* for the

following:

(1) In the event that a qualified child is resident with both mother and father, he or she will be regarded as normally residing with the mother or step-mother;

(2) If mother and father are resident in separate households, the qualified child shall be regarded as normally residing with the person with whom he or she resides for the majority of the time.

In practice, child benefit is paid to the child's mother in all cases except where the parents are separated and the father has responsibility for the full-time care of the child for more than 50% of the time.

The regulations governing the scheme does not provide for the splitting of the payment between parties in cases of shared residency arrangements for the child.

If the Deputy wishes to have a particular case considered in further detail by the Department, I will arrange this if she sends me the details.

School Meals Programme

124. **Deputy Nicky McFadden** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of schools nationally operating the school meals programme; the number of those schools that are in counties Longford and Westmeath; the way the school meals programme is administered; if it will be extended in order to ensure children receive the necessary nutrition; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42610/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The school meals programme provides funding towards the provision of food services for disadvantaged children through two schemes. The first is the statutory urban school meals scheme, operated by local authorities and part-financed by the Department. The second is the school meals local projects schemes through which funding is provided directly to participating schools and local and voluntary community groups who run their own school meals projects. The Government has allocated an additional €2 million for the school meals programme in 2013, providing a total allocation of €37 million.

A total of some 1,000 schools/organisations received funding under the school meals local projects for the school year 2012/13. Of these, 15 were based in county Longford and 20 in county Westmeath. In addition, approximately 305 schools participated in the urban school meals scheme operated by local authorities, none of which were located in counties Longford and Westmeath. The Department is currently processing applications from schools participating in the scheme for the current school year.

The scheme operates on a school year basis and all schools must apply for funding on an annual basis. Maximum rates of payment apply, based on a rate per child per day, depending on the type of meal being provided. Details of the various options available under the scheme and the maximum rates of payment per child are shown in the tabular statement.

Priority for funding under the school meals local projects is given to schools which are part of the Department of Education and Skills' initiative for disadvantaged schools, 'Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools' (DEIS).

Funding under the scheme is for food costs only, subject to certain conditions. All food

must be of suitable quality and nutritional value, and prepared and consumed in an appropriate environment. The type and range of meals provided, as well as the method and logistics of supplying the meals, are decided by the individual local groups and schools that operate the projects. Responsibility for all aspects of the day-to-day operation of the scheme lies with the school/organisation.

The additional €2 million allocated to the school meals programme budget for 2013 is being used to extend the school meals local projects scheme to DEIS and special schools. The Department contacted approximately 170 schools requesting expressions of interest in participating in the scheme for the current school year. Expressions of interest in joining the scheme were received from approximately 90 schools. To date, applications from an additional 32 schools, 1 of which is located in Co Westmeath, have been processed and further applications will be processed as schools establish their food clubs.

Any further extension to the school meals programme can only be considered in a budgetary context.

Various food options and maximum payment per child:

Meals	Cost	-
Breakfast/Snack	€0.60	Cereal, Toast, Scone, Fruit, Yogurt, Milk, Juice - 2 Items must be provided
Lunch	€1.40	Filled Sandwich/Roll or Soup & Roll or Salad Plate, plus 2 other items (eg Milk, Juice, Fruit, Yogurt)
Dinner	€1.90	Meat, Potatoes & Vegetables or Chicken Curry or Spaghetti Bolognese, plus a drink (Milk, Juice, Water)

Social Welfare Appeals Status

125. **Deputy Eric Byrne** asked the Minister for Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 182 of 2 October 2013, when a decision will be made regarding the appeal; if this appeal will be expedited; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42628/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned together with the relevant Departmental papers were received by that office on 09 September 2013 and that the case will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

In order to be fair to all appellants, appeals are dealt with in strict chronological order.

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.

Social Welfare Appeals Status

126. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a decision will issue on an appeal the habitual entitled in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Donegal. [42629/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Social Welfare Appeals Office

has advised me that the appeal in this case relates to a refusal of disability allowance on medical grounds. I understand that an oral hearing was held on 12 August 2013 and that in the course of the hearing the Appeals Officer requested the person concerned to provide reports from his GP, Orthopaedic Surgeon and Psychiatrist. As soon as the requested medical information is received, the Appeals Officer will complete his consideration of the appeal.

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.

Community Employment Schemes Eligibility

127. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will provide an update on any proposed changes to the community employment scheme programme; if there is a maximum time that a participant can avail of a CE scheme; the way it is determined that a participant is eligible to renew their place for the upcoming year within a specified scheme in which they are already engaged; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42631/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): There are currently two options for participation on Community Employment (CE) based on the length of time a person is in receipt of CE-qualifying social welfare payments:

- Part-time Integration Option (PTI) which is a one-year programme of CE for those who have generally been in receipt of qualifying social welfare payments for 52 continuous weeks or more.

- Part-time Job Option (PTJ) which is a three year programme of CE subject to annually renewable contracts for those who have generally been in receipt of qualifying social welfare payments for 156 continuous weeks or more.

With effect from 3 April 2000, lifetime cumulative participation on CE by an individual will be limited to:

- 3 years (156 weeks) for persons under 55 years of age.
- 6 years (312 weeks) for persons of 55 years of age up to and including 65 years of age.

- Eligible persons in receipt of a qualifying disability-linked Social Welfare payment will be eligible for one additional year on CE over the standard maximum participation caps, i.e. 4 years cumulative maximum time on CE for those under 55 years of age (Part-Time Job Option only), and 7 years cumulative maximum time for those between 55 and 65 (Part-Time Job Option only). Participation on CE prior to 3 April 2000 is not counted. Offshore island residents are exempt from this participation cap, subject to the availability of places on island-based CE schemes.

In terms of extending a participant's time on CE for another year under the Part-Time Integration Option, the CE Sponsor must submit a proposal for the re-engagement of participants to the Department officials at least 8 weeks before the participant's annual contract is due to expire. In the application for re-engagement the Sponsor must identify the circumstances for the re-engagement of each participant, in line with the following criteria:

- (i) Where the participant would benefit from continued participation in terms of additional development and training by clearly outlining his/her specific continued engagement within

their Individual Learner Plan or,

(ii) Where completion of a project has been delayed for a short time for reasons outside the control of the Sponsor,

Criterion (i) above will be the main basis on which re-engagements will be considered, criterion (ii) is to be treated as exceptional. A **maximum of 10%** of current Part-Time Integration participants on a project can apply for re-engagement for a further year. This does not apply to Part Time Job Option participants.

For Part-Time Job Option participants, the Sponsor must again supply the details in writing at least 8 weeks before the project year ends, or the participant's annual contract is due to expire. Persons considered "job-ready" by their Supervisor at their contract renewal time will not be extended into a further year. The operating procedures for Community Employment are kept under review and updated regularly. All amendments are notified to Department staff and CE Sponsors at each new release.

Family Income Supplement Expenditure

128. **Deputy Nicky McFadden** asked the Minister for Social Protection if the family income supplement scheme will continue to be administered in order to provide financial support to those on low wages; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42644/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The family income supplement (FIS) provides income support for employees with families on low earnings, who otherwise might be at risk of financial poverty. FIS also preserves the incentive to remain in employment in circumstances where the employee might only be marginally better off than if he or she were unemployed and claiming social welfare. Expenditure on FIS for 2012 was of the order of €224 million in respect of some 32,000 families. The estimated expenditure for 2013 is expected to be €229 million.

To qualify for payment of FIS, a person must be engaged in full-time insurable employment which is expected to last for at least 3 months and be working for a minimum of 38 hours per fortnight or 19 hours per week. Furthermore, the average family income must be below a specified amount which varies according to the number of qualified children in the family. The applicant must also have at least one qualified child who normally resides with him/her or is supported by him/her.

Creating jobs and reducing unemployment are key challenges facing the Government. The tax and social protection systems have a part to play in addressing these issues and in ensuring work is remunerative. To this end, I established an Advisory Group on Tax and Social Welfare with the aim of harnessing expert opinion and experience in order to address a number of specific issues. These include making cost-effective proposals for improving employment incentives and achieving better poverty outcomes. The Group is currently examining the issue of working age supports, including in-work supports such as FIS.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Appeals

129. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will expedite a domiciliary care appeal in respect of a person (details supplied). [42648/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I am advised by the Social Welfare

Appeals Office that an Appeals Officer, having fully considered all of the available evidence, has decided to allow the appeal of the person concerned by way of a summary decision. The person concerned has been notified of the Appeals Officer's decision. The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

Rent Supplement Scheme Applications

130. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the position regarding an application for rent allowance in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42661/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The rent supplement claim for the person concerned has been awarded.

National Internship Scheme Administration

131. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Social Protection if any exception exists for the JobBridge scheme to allow a sole trader to take on an intern where there is no other full-time member of staff (details supplied); the reason this rule exists; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42670/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The company size/employment thresholds which are used for the purpose of determining the maximum number of interns which an organisation may host is set out in the table. The requirement that an organisation must have a minimum of 1 full time employee who is employed for 30 hours or more per week, is on the payroll and subject to PAYE and PRSI, applies to all host organisations. The rationale for this requirement is twofold. First it is designed to limit the potential for internships to displace existing or new paid roles in an organisation. Second the purpose of internships is to offer jobseekers experience of a work environment where they can learn from, and be mentored by, work colleagues. The Department takes the view that a host organisation requires at least one other employee to provide the necessary workplace environment to support mentoring of, and the acquisition of workplace skills by, interns.

Appendix: Employment Size Thresholds for Internships.

Number of Full Time Employees*	Number of Internships
1-10 employees	1 internship place
11-20 employees	3 internship places
21-30 employees	4 internship places
30 + employees	20% of the workforce to a maximum of 200 internships whichever is the smaller

* Who is employed for 30 hours or more per week (i.e. on payroll and subject to PAYE and PRSI)

Live Register Data

132. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Social Protection the total number

of persons who have left the live register in the past 12 months; of those, the total number who found full-time employment; the number who found part-time employment; the number who moved onto a State sponsored employment scheme; the number who transferred to another social welfare payment; the number who left the country; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42673/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): A total of 407,207 live register claims were closed during the period October 2012 to September 2013. Information relating to the total number who found full-time employment; the number who found part-time employment; the number who moved onto a State sponsored employment scheme; and the number who left the country is not available in my Department. However, the breakdown of closure reasons as offered by people when they signed off is set out in the attached tabular statement.

Live Register Claim Closures October 2012 to September 2013

Reason	Closures	Percentage of Total Closures
Found Work	135,689	33.3%
No Longer Entitled to Unemployment	145,190	35.7%
No Reason Stated	48,964	12.0%
Other	20,367	5.0%
Took up Educational, Training or Employment Placement	28,204	6.9%
Transferred to other DSP Schemes	28,793	7.1%
Total	407,207	100.0%

Invalidity Pension Appeals

133. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a decision will issue on an invalidity pension appeal in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42683/13]

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 22 August 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.

Disability Allowance Appeals

134. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the progress made to date in respect of an appeal for disability allowance in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42686/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The person concerned applied for disability allowance on 19 December 2012. Based upon the evidence submitted, he was refused on medical grounds and the person was notified in writing of this decision on 22 February 2013.

A review of this decision was completed on 3 July 2013 as a result of which there was no change to the original decision to disallow on medical grounds and the person was notified of this outcome.

The person subsequently appealed the decision to the Social Welfare Appeals Office and his claim has recently been forwarded to that Office for determination. He will be contacted by the Appeals Office in due course in relation to progress on his case.

Supplementary Welfare Allowance Payments

135. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Social Protection her plans to reduce the amounts available for social welfare recipients to claim for kitchen appliances and household furniture; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42692/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Under the supplementary welfare allowance (SWA) scheme, the Department may make a single exceptional needs payment (ENP) to help meet essential, once-off and unforeseen expenditure which a person could not reasonably be expected to meet out of their weekly income. The Government has provided over €47 million for the ENP scheme in 2013.

ENPs are payable at the discretion of the officers administering the SWA scheme taking into account the requirements of the legislation and all the relevant circumstances of the case in order to ensure that the payments target those most in need of assistance.

A review of the guidelines on exceptional needs payments was carried out for the Department by a working group made up of community welfare service staff. One of the recommendations emanating from this review was to address the different approaches taken, in different areas in relation to the payment of ENPs. The 2013 guidelines that issued to staff made recommendations in relation to the maximum amounts payable for a number of items including kitchen appliances and household furniture. ENPs in respect of these items are still payable within the maximum amounts set.

Carer's Allowance Appeals

136. **Deputy Jerry Buttimer** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reasons for the delay in processing the appeal of a decision on carer's allowance in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Cork; when a decision can be expected; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42700/13]

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 7th May 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 were received in the Social Welfare Appeals Office on 3rd September 2013 and the case was referred to an Appeals Officer on 3rd October 2013 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

137. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will expedite an application for carer's allowance in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Wicklow; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42767/13]

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 14th May 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 were received in the Social Welfare Appeals Office on 03rd September 2013 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.

Tourism Industry Issues

138. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if he will examine the retention of the Torc waterfall and Muckcross House and gardens sign, erected by licensed jarveys at the Muckcross Abbey gates jarvey stand, as it is a good quality design, is a standard size and is unobtrusive in an appropriate location; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42639/13]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan): The sign referred to had been placed on Killarney National Park lands without appropriate consultation or permission. The management of the Park received a number of complaints from visitors who had, as a result of this sign, parked at the Muckcross Abbey Gate entrance in the mistaken belief that it was the only entrance to Muckcross House and Torc Waterfall. In the circumstances the Park management's request for the removal of the sign was reasonable.

With regard to proposals concerning such signage, I understand that the functions of Kerry County Council, as the road authority involved, include responsibility for the specification, construction and maintenance of road signs and markings and also, that any planning issues concerning such signage would similarly be a matter for Kerry County Council.

Heritage Council Funding

139. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if he will ensure there are no further cuts to the budget of the Heritage Council in 2013; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the council is seeking an increase in its budget this year of €1 million, to benefit communities across Ireland, following a decrease in the council's budget of 66% from 2008 to 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42693/13]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan): The allocation to the Heritage Council in 2014 will be subject to the normal budgetary processes. I am aware of the Heritage Council's request for additional funding. However, the scope to provide additional funding for the protection, conservation and development of the State's heritage is

constrained by the current national economic difficulties and the significant reduction in the public finances.

My Department will continue to provide funding for the protection, conservation and development of our built and natural heritage, in so far as resources allow.

Special Areas of Conservation Criteria

140. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if he will provide an update on the work being carried out by the consultants RPS on a national management plan for bogs included in the turf-cutting plan, with specific reference to concerns of residents in those areas regarding potential flooding and the way local residences will be protected; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42756/13]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan): In keeping with the recommendations of Mr. Justice John Quirke, on 7th of March last year, Dáil Éireann agreed a motion put forward by the technical group to “engage actively with the European Commission to seek a resolution within the terms of the Habitats Directive, and to prepare and submit a National Raised Bog Restoration Plan to the Commission as a matter of urgency”.

Following the motion, I immediately secured the agreement of Environment Commissioner Potočnik to the development of a National Raised Bog SAC Management Plan.

The plan will set out the approach to the future restoration and management of each of the SACs, and may unlock some flexibility, within the terms of the Habitats Directive, to address the most difficult of sites, where relocation alternatives for turf-cutters may be limited.

To progress the preparation of the plan, my Department engaged a team of specialists - RPS - to provide the scientific basis for raised bog conservation in Ireland. RPS has been working with my Department and the Peatlands Council to prepare a National Raised Bog SAC Management Plan, a draft of which I hope to make available for consultation before the end of the year. Further information on the work of RPS can be found at www.raisedbogrestoration.ie.

The draft plan will include a number of case studies to illustrate the scientific approach that will be needed for the restoration of all 53 raised bog SACs and to address concerns regarding implications for surrounding land. The surveys will involve site visits to verify drainage systems and to take other scientific measurements. I would like to make it clear that this is a scientific survey and that no restoration work is to take place during this survey. I would also like to make it clear that no future restoration work will be carried out on any raised bog SAC without full consultation and engagement with stakeholders.

This is set out clearly in the documentation which has been produced to guide this process, which is available to the public on www.raisedbogrestoration.ie. The Raised Bog Conservation Study SEA Scoping Report states:

The development of a National Raised Bog SAC Management Plan was recommended by Mr. Justice John Quirke in his report following the 2012 Peatland Forum. A national plan was also called for in a unanimous Dáil vote in 2012. The purpose of the plan is to provide the ability to explore whether there are any other options available for those sites where relocation is genuinely not possible. It also indicates how the 53 SACs are to be restored and managed into the future, which will be done in full consultation and partnership with those who own the bogs and surrounding land owners.

For the avoidance of all doubt, what is being conducted at the moment is a scientific survey. Comments in the local media from some parties about a risk of flooding arising from this simple scientific survey are unfounded. I am happy to reassure all partners in this process that this is a scientific survey and any future actions that might be proposed arising from it will only be considered in consultation with the local community and landowners.

I would therefore encourage all turf cutting committees, property owners and stakeholders to engage with this very preliminary assessment, so that an informed discussion can begin on the future management options for each site.

Public Sector Staff Redundancies

141. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the reduction in public sector numbers that will be achieved in 2013 and 2014 from targeted redundancy and early retirement in his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43029/13]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan): There are currently no proposals for targeted redundancies in my Department. As the Deputy will appreciate, the decision as to whether to opt for early retirement under the terms of the grace period as set down in the Haddington Road Agreement is a matter for eligible individual members of staff. I understand that, while a number of staff have been in contact with the personnel section of my Department in that regard, it is, as yet, too early to project a specific number for such retirements over the period in question.

Wind Energy Generation

142. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will provide details of grant aid and or subsidies which have been paid to wind farm developments each year since 2000; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42547/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): The primary support mechanisms for renewables, including wind farms, are the Alternative Energy Requirement schemes and the Renewable Energy Feed-In-Tariff (REFIT) schemes. These schemes were introduced to incentivise the development of renewable electricity generation capacity necessary to allow Ireland to meet its target of meeting 40% of electricity demand from renewable generation by 2020. This target must be achieved in order for Ireland to meet its binding obligation of 16% of total energy demand to be met from renewable sources by 2020. All of the renewable energy support schemes provide subsidies to eligible projects as opposed to grant aid.

The Alternative Energy Requirement (AER) was a series of 6 competitive tender schemes to support new renewable generation that were run to the mid 2000s. AER was subsequently replaced by the feed-in tariff scheme known as REFIT. The AER schemes were all introduced prior to full electricity market liberalisation.

REFIT is based around 15 year Power Purchase Agreements between generators and suppliers which provide developers with the necessary certainty required to finance their projects. Both AER and REFIT are funded from the Public Service Obligation (PSO) levy.

The estimates for how much subsidy is funded by way of the PSO levy for each year since 2003 are published in the annual PSO decision by the Commission for Energy Regulation (CER). While the bulk of subsidies for renewable electricity generation paid under these schemes have been for wind, the CER has initiated a project to generate a report on the annual and cumulative costs to date in relation to AER and REFIT support schemes for each technology supported. The following table presents the costs for both AER and REFIT since 2003 (the 2003 figure for AER is cumulative from the year 2000):

Year	AER	REFIT
	€m	€m
2013/14	-8.0	51.1
2012/13	7.1	47.5
2011/12	0.7	35.8
2010/11	13.5	29.7
2009/10	24.3	39.8
2008/9	-58.4	24.4
2008	0.4	
2007	-29.9	
2006	0.2	
2005	12.3	
2004	16.1	
2003	6.6	

Broadband Services Provision

143. **Deputy Noel Harrington** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources when the poor broadband service experienced by residents and businesses in Skibbereen, County Cork, over the past few weeks will be resolved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42556/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): Ireland's telecommunications market has been fully liberalised since 1999 in accordance with the requirements of binding EU Directives. The provision of electronic communications services, including broadband services and the restoration of full services when faults occur are, in the first instance, matters for the service providers operating in Ireland's fully liberalised telecommunications market, regulated by the independent regulator, the Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg).

Where customers are experiencing difficulties in relation to any aspect of their telecommunications/broadband service they should raise the matter with their service provider. Where this fails to resolve matters, they should refer it to ComReg who will investigate the issue.

The State can only intervene to ensure access to broadband services in areas where the competitive market fails to deliver such services. The Government's National Broadband Plan, which I published in August 2012, aims to radically change the broadband landscape in Ireland by ensuring that high speed broadband is available to all citizens and businesses, including those in living in County Cork. This will be achieved by providing:

- a policy and regulatory framework that assists in accelerating and incentivising commercial investment, and

- a State-led investment for areas where it is not commercial for the market to invest.

Since the publication of the Plan, investments by the commercial sector are underway in both fixed line and wireless high speed broadband services. In order to progress the State-led investment for areas where it is not commercial for the market to invest, a full procurement process must be designed and EU State Aids approval must be obtained.

My Department is engaged in a comprehensive mapping exercise of the current and anticipated investment by the commercial sector to identify where the market is expected to deliver high speed broadband services over the coming years. The results of this mapping exercise will inform the precise areas that need to be targeted in the State-led investment as envisaged in the National Broadband Plan.

Intensive technical, financial and legal preparations, including stakeholder engagement, are ongoing. The procurement process for the approved intervention will be carried out in accordance with EU and Irish procurement rules and it is expected that it will be launched in 2014.

Through the implementation of the National Broadband Plan, I am committed to ensuring that all parts of Ireland have access to high speed broadband, with a view to ensuring that all citizens and businesses can participate fully in a digitally enabled society.

Telecommunications Services Provision

144. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will intervene to ensure a mobile service provider (details supplied) will provide an adequate service to paying customers in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42688/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): The provision of mobile telecommunications services networks within Ireland's competitive market is subject to a requirement to secure a wireless telegraphy licence to access the required radio spectrum. The award of such licenses, the imposition of terms and conditions to access that spectrum and the associated monitoring of compliance by licensed providers with those terms and conditions are matters for the Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg), which is independent in the exercise of its functions. Accordingly, I have no statutory function in this matter. I note however that the matter has been raised previously with ComReg and I have referred the matter again to ComReg and asked them to correspond directly with the Deputy on this matter.

I expect that with the continued significant capital investments being made by mobile operators, the quality of mobile services will continue to improve across the country. I note in this regard that Vodafone announced earlier this year, a phased programme to upgrade its network.

Island Communities

145. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the position regarding island infrastructure deficit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42777/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): Ireland's telecommunications market has been fully liberalised since 1999 in accordance with the requirements of binding EU Directives. The market has since developed into a well-regulat-

ed market, supporting a multiplicity of commercial operators, providing services over a diverse range of technology platforms. Details of broadband services available in each County, including the islands, can be found on ComReg's website at www.callcosts.ie.

The State can only intervene to ensure access to broadband services in areas where the competitive market fails to deliver such services, as in the case of the National Broadband Scheme (NBS). Broadband services under the NBS are available since October 2010 from the NBS service provider, "3", to persons with a fixed residence or fixed business in the designated NBS Electoral Divisions. The areas covered by the NBS include many of the islands around Ireland. The combination of private investment and State interventions means that Ireland has met the EU Commission's Digital Agenda for Europe target of having a basic broadband service available to all areas by 2013.

The Government's National Broadband Plan, which I published in August 2012, aims to radically change the broadband landscape in Ireland by ensuring that high speed broadband is available to all citizens and businesses, including those in living on the islands. This will be achieved by providing:

- a policy and regulatory framework that assists in accelerating and incentivising commercial investment, and
- a State-led investment for areas where it is not commercial for the market to invest.

Since the publication of the Plan, investments by the commercial sector are underway in both fixed line and wireless high speed broadband services. In order to progress the State-led investment for areas where it is not commercial for the market to invest, a full procurement process must be designed and EU State Aids approval must be obtained.

My Department is engaged in a comprehensive mapping exercise of the current and anticipated investment by the commercial sector to identify where the market is expected to deliver high speed broadband services over the coming years. The results of this mapping exercise will inform the precise areas that need to be targeted in the State-led investment as envisaged in the National Broadband Plan.

Intensive technical, financial and legal preparations, including stakeholder engagement, are ongoing. The procurement process for the approved intervention will be carried out in accordance with EU and Irish procurement rules and it is expected that it will be launched in 2014.

Through the implementation of the National Broadband Plan, I am committed to ensuring that all parts of Ireland have access to high speed broadband, with a view to ensuring that all citizens and businesses can participate fully in a digitally enabled society.

Public Sector Staff Redundancies

146. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the reduction in public expenditure numbers that will be achieved in 2013 and 2014 from targeted redundancy and early retirement in his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43031/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): There is no scheme for targeted redundancies in my Department.

Application under the Cost Neutral Early Retirement Scheme is a matter for individual staff

members. My Department currently has no applications under this scheme and it is not possible to predict the extent of any future applications.

Housing Finance Agency Funding

147. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to an offer by the European Investment Bank to provide funding to assist in the construction of affordable mixed use housing through both State delivery and State partnerships with housing associations; the amount of funding that has been taken up or will be taken up; if no such offer has been accepted, the reason for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42679/13]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): In 2011 the Capital Advance Leasing Facility (CALF) was introduced to facilitate the securing of finance by Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) from sources other than the Exchequer, including from the Housing Finance Agency and private lending institutions. The CALF provides a capital equity injection which assists AHB’s in securing private finance. To date over €10 million has been advanced to AHBs using this facility which has supported the provision of 158 social housing units. It is open to AHBs to consider and put forward proposals to meet housing need under the CALF. I am not aware of any case where loan finance has been sourced by AHB’s from the European Investment Bank.

My Department has submitted a proposal under the South and East Regional Operational Programme 2014-2020 for the deep retrofitting of some 2,000 apartments and flats in Dublin, Cork and Limerick at an estimated cost of €100 million. It is proposed that 50% of the cost would be met by way of loan finance from the European Investment Bank to a number of AHB’s who would undertake the retrofitting works and manage and maintain the properties on behalf of the local authority. The balance of the funding would be met by way of a 25% capital contribution by the Exchequer and a 25% grant from the European Regional Development Fund. Further social housing proposals of this nature and involving the EIB and the AHB’s will be considered in the context of the outcome of this proposal.

Motor Tax Exemptions

148. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will examine the potential to bring into effect a concessionary rate of road tax for compact tractors, those being under 50 bhp, as it would be beneficial to encourage the purchase and use of such vehicles on health and safety grounds for the agricultural and ground care sectors, especially as such vehicles when sold are required to be fitted with safety equipment that is not necessary on other vehicles, such as quad bikes, used for similar purposes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42562/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): An annual concessionary rate of tax of €102 per annum applies to agricultural tractors and agricultural machinery. I have no plans to reduce this rate.

Local Government Fund

149. **Deputy Kevin Humphreys** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and

Local Government if he will detail the sums remitted to the local government fund in 2013, and the source of those revenues, outlining the amount of direct funding from the Exchequer and the portion from motor taxes with a breakdown of any other revenues; and if he will outline the way the local property tax revenues are accounted for in this, the way it will be accounted for in 2014 in the local government fund, and the projected local government fund in 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42608/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): The principal source of revenue for the Local Government Fund in 2013 is the proceeds of motor tax. The published 2013 Revised Estimates Volume projected motor tax receipts of € 1.109 billion, receipts from the Household Charge of €10 million and interest of €600,000.

The local government funding model will change considerably in 2014. Under the Finance (Local Property Tax) Act 2012, commencing in 2014, the Minister for Finance will pay into the Local Government Fund an amount equivalent to the Local Property Tax paid into the Central Fund during that year. The general issue of local government funding in 2014 will be decided in the context of Budget 2014.

Leader Programmes Funding

150. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide necessary funding to North and East Kerry Development Board to enable the board to fund an indoor recreational facility complex in Castleisland which is an urgent requirement for the social and sporting needs of the area. [42638/13]

151. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will allocate the necessary Leader funding to the North and East Kerry Development Board to service the Chorca Dhuibhne west Kerry area, which up to now had no dedicated Leader group to fund many projects (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42641/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 150 and 151 together.

My Department continues to monitor the situation with regard to the allocation and draw-down of funding under the LEADER elements of the Rural Development Programme 2007-2013 (RDP). I advised all Local Development Companies (LDCs), including North and East Kerry Development Limited (NEKD), 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.

Currently there is approximately €19.2m 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 NEKD, 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 LDC is 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 this process. I understand that both projects in question are being brought to the board of NEKD for approval in principle and, in this context, it will be a decision for the NEKD Partnership to determine how to address project funding should additional funds become available.

Local Authority Housing Maintenance

152. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the position regarding building repairs in respect of a person's property (details supplied) in Dublin 5. [42646/13]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): Under section 58 of the Housing Act 1966, the management and maintenance of local authority housing stock is the responsibility of the relevant housing authority, in this case Dublin City Council. I have no function in relation to the matters referred to in the question.

Shared Ownership Scheme

153. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if the review of the shared ownership loan scheme is complete; if he will share the findings of the report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42664/13]

154. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his views on whether there is a potential risk to local authorities in cases where persons are unable to buy out their portion of the shared ownership loans where the value of the property has fallen significantly; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42671/13]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 153 and 154 together.

The Government's 2011 housing policy statement announced the standing down of all affordable housing schemes, including the shared ownership scheme, in the context of a full review of Part V of the Planning and Development Act. That review is available on my Department's website www.envron.ie and the period for public submissions closed on 27 September 2013.

Earlier this year, I asked the Housing & Sustainable Communities Agency to conduct a standalone review of the shared ownership scheme, including identification of the main difficulties and recommendations for mitigating measures. I have received an interim draft of the review from the Agency and I intend to issue a circular letter to local authorities this month with preliminary recommendations arising from the review. A number of issues have been identified that need further detailed financial analysis in order to fully assess the impact on local authority finances of possible mitigating measures. This additional work is underway and I expect to make further recommendations in the coming months.

Commercial Rates Valuation Process

155. **Deputy Regina Doherty** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will review the situation whereby the commercial rates paid by an accredited equestrian school (details supplied) in County Meath are higher than those of non-accredited centres; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42672/13]

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 for Valuation has sole responsibility for all valuation matters and the Valuation Act 2001 comes under the aegis of my colleague, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform.

The property's valuation, together with the annual rate on valuation (ARV) decided by the elected members of each local authority in the annual budget, determines the level of rates to be paid. 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.

NAMA Portfolio Issues

156. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide in tabular form, for the years 2011 to 2013, inclusive, the number of houses offered by the National Asset Management Agency to each local authority here; the number of offers proceeded with and the number of offers refused; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42674/13]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): In 2011 NAMA identified 73 housing units that may be suitable for Social Housing purposes; in 2012 a further 4,039 were identified and in 2013, to date, an additional 239 units have been identified. Of these 4,351 units identified by NAMA, currently 1,900 have been deemed suitable and of these 443 have completed or been contracted. Another 290 properties are currently being evaluated. The local authorities have confirmed that 1,359 of the properties identified are considered unsuitable by reference to sustainable planning and housing policy or are located in areas with no demand. While the process of assessing demand was on-going a further 802 properties were either sold or privately let by their owners or receivers.

My Department, the Housing Agency and NAMA continue to work together with housing authorities and approved housing bodies towards identifying suitable NAMA housing units and bringing them into social housing use. A breakdown by county of the units identified, deemed suitable and completed or contracted is shown in the following table.

County	Identified	Suitable	Complete/Contracted
Carlow	137	82	55
Cavan	47		
Clare	169	19	7
Cork	471	271	36
Cork City	419	202	53
Donegal	95	59	
Dublin City	628	252	55
Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown	328	122	58
Fingal	203	45	20
Galway	84	44	
Galway City	117	117	45
Kerry	90	52	15

County	Identified	Suitable	Complete/Contracted
Kildare	243	97	57
Kilkenny	167	96	
Laois	98	10	
Leitrim	35		
Limerick	112	9	9
Longford	31	11	
Louth	27	27	27
Mayo	66	58	
Meath	203	38	
Monaghan	35	30	
North Tipperary	13		
Offaly	79	64	
Roscommon	91	1	
Sligo	46	15	
South Dublin	60	42	
South Tipperary	24		
Waterford	65	27	
Westmeath	42	29	4
Wexford	90	74	2
Wicklow	36	7	
Total	4,351	1,900	443

Local Authority Housing Mortgages

157. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide in tabular form for each of the years 2011 to 2013, inclusive, the number of local authority loans applied for, approved and drawn down in each administrative area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42675/13]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): My Department collates and publishes a wide range of housing and planning statistics that inform the preparation and evaluation of policy, and those data are available on my Department’s website www.envron.ie.

Data on number of local authority loan house purchase loan applications are not included in this range. Data on the number of local authority loan house purchase loan approvals and drawdowns are included in this range; however, they are not broken down by administrative area. A breakdown of the loans approved and paid broken down by county area is provided in the following table:

Loans funded by local authorities*

County Councils	2011		2012		2013 - 6 months	
	LOANS APPROVED	LOANS PAID	LOANS APPROVED	LOANS PAID	LOANS APPROVED	LOANS PAID
Carlow	2	1	4	3	9	5
Cavan	1	0	2	1	1	0
Clare	0	0	0	0	0	0

Questions - Written Answers

	2011		2012		2013 - 6 months	
County Councils	LOANS APPROVED	LOANS PAID	LOANS APPROVED	LOANS PAID	LOANS APPROVED	LOANS PAID
Cork	0	0	2	2	5	3
Donegal	0	3	0	0	3	2
DL/Rath-down	0	0	6	5	0	0
Fingal	1	0	16	15	7	6
Galway	1	2	0	0	1	0
Kerry	0	0	0	0	2	0
Kildare	0	0	0	0	1	1
Kilkenny	3	2	5	4	4	4
Laois	11	6	19	16	15	5
Leitrim	0	0	2	2	1	1
Limerick	0	0	9	5	6	4
Longford	2	2	3	3	0	0
Louth	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mayo	24	7	34	31	8	16
Meath	5	4	11	8	2	2
Monaghan	4	2	5	5	2	1
North Tipperary	0	0	3	0	0	1
Offaly	0	0	0	0	0	0
Roscommon	0	0	1	1	0	1
Sligo	0	1	6	0	2	3
South Dublin	1	0	6	5	1	0
South Tipperary	0	0	0	0	0	1
Waterford	0	0	4	2	1	1
Westmeath	2	1	0	0	1	0
Wexford	10	4	9	13	6	1
Wicklow	0	0	1	2	1	4
City Councils						
Cork	0	0	2	0	3	3
Dublin	13	9	41	25	18	27
Galway	0	0	0	0	0	0
Limerick	3	2	5	6	0	0
Waterford	1	1	6	3	1	2
Borough Councils						
Clonmel	0	0	1	1	0	0
Drogheda	1	1	16	15	12	15
Kilkenny	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sligo	1	0	1	2	0	0
Wexford	0	0	0	0	0	0
Town Councils						
Athlone	0	0	0	0	0	0
Bray	0	0	0	0	0	0
Dundalk	0	0	0	0	2	2

	2011		2012		2013 - 6 months	
County Councils	LOANS APPROVED	LOANS PAID	LOANS APPROVED	LOANS PAID	LOANS APPROVED	LOANS PAID
TOTAL	86	48	220	175	115	111

* Loans paid in a certain year may relate to loans approved in previous years.

Local Government Reform

158. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government in view of his policy of encouraging more women to participate in the political process and local government, the steps being taken by him to encourage greater female participation in the upper echelons of local government administration; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42676/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): As indicated in the Government's Action Programme for Effective Local Government, Putting People First, it is the intention to encourage the participation of women as elected members in local government. The promotion of gender equality in local government is dealt with at paragraph 11.8 of the Programme.

Part 6 of the Electoral (Amendment) (Political Funding) Act 2012 will require political parties to achieve a gender balance in candidate selection at general elections. This provision links the State funding of political parties to the achievement of a gender balance in candidate selection at Dáil general elections. In order to receive full State funding, a qualified political party will have to have at least 30% women candidates and at least 30% men candidates at the next general election. Seven years from the next general election, this will rise to 40%. The new legislative provisions are designed as an incentive mechanism to encourage political parties to apply a more equal gender balance in the selection of candidates. It is intended that this measure would have a knock-on effect by providing an incentive to political parties voluntarily to apply similar arrangements at local elections.

As regards local government administration, recruitment competitions at senior level are held by the Public Appointments Service in co-operation with my Department and the relevant local authorities, all of whom are committed to the highest standards of customer service and comply with equality and other relevant legislation and codes of practice. Recruitment competitions held at local level adhere to the same high standards particularly in regards to equality legislation and related compliance.

Flood Risk Assessments

159. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 179 of 18 April 2013 and having regard to the ongoing concerns of residents and retailers in the area (details supplied) and keeping in mind expenditure undertaken by the local authority in the context of alleviation of flooding in 2009/2010, the extent to which the local authority can use its statutory powers and fulfil its commitments already entered into in respect of compliance with the conditions set out in the relevant planning permissions which impose certain obligations on the local authority; when it is expected that all outstanding issues will be dealt with in full and thereby ensuring the completion of the development as promised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42762/13]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) provides that a planning authority may attach conditions to a planning permission including related to the provision of infrastructure such as drainage. It is a matter for the planning authority to decide on the planning conditions to be attached including the enforcement of these conditions thereafter.

My Department understands from Kildare County Council that following the completion of significant works, undertaken by the Council, the matter is now largely resolved at catchment level. Within the development, other drainage works which are the responsibility of the developer remain to be completed. The Council is continuing to work with the relevant parties to ensure a permanent resolution of the remaining flooding issues within the development.

Pyrite Remediation Programme Issues

160. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if a decision has been made on the levy to apply to industry as part of the pyrite resolution process; if he will provide an update on the process; if legislation is needed and ready; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42770/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): Following Government Decisions of 18 December 2012 and 30 April 2013 work commenced in my Department on developing the legislation required to provide for the funding of a pyrite remediation scheme and the necessary structures to deliver an effective and efficient remediation process. While it was my intention to have this legislation published and enacted in the previous Dáil term this was not possible as a number of legal issues arose which have to be addressed.

I am working, with my Department, to ensure that these issues are resolved as a matter of urgency and in this context I will be bringing proposals to Government shortly. In tandem with the development of the necessary legislation, I understand that the Pyrite Resolution Board is working on the delivery of its online application and processing system. While there has been some slippage in the timeline as originally envisaged, the Board is committed to having the system operable as quickly as possible.

I am acutely aware that many homeowners have been waiting for effective solutions for a considerable period of time and, accordingly, I will continue to attach the utmost priority to providing the structures necessary to deliver a practical resolution to the pyrite problem as early as possible.

Island Communities

161. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the position regarding island specific programmes and policies (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42776/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): Implementation arrangements for local development programmes under the new local governance arrangements set out under Putting People First - Action Programme for Effective Local Government, are being considered currently by an Alignment Working Group that was established to advise and assist my Department in the implementation of the alignment rec-

ommendations. Their considerations are now advanced regarding the optimum programme implementation arrangements under Local Community Development Committees, which will be established in each local authority area to have responsibility for planning and oversight of local and community development programmes.

These considerations include options to retain the expertise and experience that currently resides with local development bodies and their staff. Equally, we must look to implement arrangements that will deliver the best outcomes for citizens and communities in a time of constrained budgets. Pending finalisation of the Working Group's considerations on this issue, it would be inappropriate for me to commit to any particular implementation arrangement at this time. Putting People First recognised the challenges arising from the complexity of the local development structures and the high overhead and administration costs, but also the strengths of local development companies and programmes in respect of service planning and delivery.

Island Communities

162. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the position regarding firefighting training and safety on islands (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42780/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): The provision of a fire service in its area, including the establishment and maintenance of a fire brigade, the assessment of fire cover needs, the provision of a premises and the making of such other provisions as it considers necessary or desirable, is a statutory function of individual fire authorities under the provisions of the Fire Services Acts 1981 and 2003. My Department supports fire authorities through the setting of general policy, provision of training support and issue of guidance on operational and other related matters and the provision of capital funding.

Earlier in 2013 I published the policy document Keeping Communities safe (KCS), which is intended to keep fire safety and fire services in Ireland in line with international best practice. KCS was developed to ensure that Ireland manages its fire risk effectively and continues the downward trend in the level of fire fatalities recorded annually. The current annual rate of 6.2 fire deaths per million of population places Ireland among the most fire safe countries. KCS is based on the systems approach which emphasizes the further development and enhancement of fire prevention and fire protection as well as fire service response. KCS places an appropriate emphasis on isolated communities being prioritised for Community Safety programmes to ensure that households in such areas are given advice on fire prevention and have smoke alarms and other appropriate fire protection facilities. These simple measures are regarded as the most effective means of ensuring the safety of persons in the case of fire. Community fire safety initiatives involving the provision of fire prevention advice and smoke alarms, fire blankets and fire extinguishers were developed and provided for off-shore island communities and are maintained and renewed as appropriate by the relevant local authorities.

The provision of fire services by local authorities is based on a risk management approach which involves an analysis of the nature of the fire hazards and the incidence and extent of fires which occur as well as the fire protection measures in place. Having regard to the need to ensure the safety of persons engaged in fire-fighting and the levels of training required, the provision by local authorities of training or equipment for members of the public is currently provided as part of community safety programmes of general application.

Departmental Staff Retirements

163. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the reduction in public expenditure numbers that will be achieved in 2013 and 2014 from targeted redundancy and early retirement in his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43034/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): It is not possible to predict how many staff may decide to retire early between now and the end of 2014. There will, however, be 9 compulsory retirements in my Department over the course of 2013/14. There is no targeted redundancy scheme currently operating in my Department.

Garda Deployment

164. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghaíl** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 492 of 1 October, the total number of Gardaí assigned to the Divisional Drugs Unit in County Kildare; the number of divisional drugs units that are operational across the State; the number of Gardaí assigned to each unit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42663/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): As I have previously stated, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the detailed allocation of resources, including personnel, throughout the organisation and I have no direct function in the matter. This allocation of resources is constantly monitored in the context of demographics, crime trends, policing needs and other operational strategies in place on a District, Divisional and Regional level to ensure optimum use is made of Garda resources and the best possible Garda service is provided to the public.

All Gardaí have responsibilities in the prevention and detection of criminal activity whether it be in the area of burglary, drug offences or otherwise. I can assure the Deputy that An Garda Síochána continues to pro-actively and resolutely tackle all forms of drug crime in this jurisdiction. The Garda National Drugs Unit works closely with dedicated Divisional and District Drug Units and other national units in targeting persons involved in the illicit sale and supply of drugs.

I am informed by the Commissioner that there are 317 Gardaí, 29 Garda Reservists and 28 Civilians assigned to the Kildare Division and two of these Gardaí are specifically assigned to Divisional Drugs Unit. I have further been informed by the Garda Commissioner that the personnel strength of each Divisional Drugs Unit on 31 August 2013, the latest date for which figures are readily available, was as set out in the table hereunder:

Division	Total
D.M.R.S.C.	10
D.M.R.N.C	16
D.M.R.N.	29
D.M.R.E.	13
D.M.R.S.	26
D.M.R.W.	26
Waterford	9
Wexford	4
Kilkenny/Carlow	7

Division	Total
Tipperary	9
Cork City	27
Cork North	10
Cork West	4
Kerry	8
Limerick	11
Donegal	10
Cavan/Monaghan	0
Sligo/Leitrim	8
Louth	6
Clare	6
Mayo	5
Galway	11
Roscommon/Longford	7
Westmeath	7
Meath	5
Kildare	2
Laois/Offaly	0
Wicklow	3
Total	279

Garda Reserve

165. **Deputy Patrick Nulty** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he is willing to hear appeals from members of the Garda Reserve who are unable to access recruitment procedures for An Garda Síochána due to age restrictions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42665/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The maximum recruitment age at which candidates may apply to join the Garda Síochána as a full time member is set by regulation at not more than 35 years and the question of appealing that upper age limit does not arise.

This upper age limit of 35 was set having regard to equality legislation and also took into account the following criteria:

- The cost of training.
- The need for recruits to serve for a sufficient period of time as full members of the service to recoup this cost.
- The operational requirements of the service in terms of having an age profile appropriate to the physical demands placed on full time members in the course of their duty.

Departmental Expenditure

166. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Defence the reduction in public expendi-

ture numbers that will be achieved in 2013 and 2014 from targeted redundancy and early retirement in his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43032/13]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): The staff of my Department comprises of civil servants and civilian employees. The early retirement options available to the staff of my Department are the Ill Health Retirement Scheme and the Cost Neutral Early Retirement Scheme. An employee with an on-going serious medical condition who has at least five years' pensionable service may apply to retire on grounds of ill-health. Ill health retirement applications are considered initially by the Chief Medical Officer, who on receipt of an application from an officer, offers a medical opinion as to whether an individual is incapable on medical grounds of regular and effective service at the time of the application and whether the medical incapacity is likely to be permanent. Four applications for ill health retirement have been approved to date this year. A further three applications are on hand.

The Cost Neutral Early Retirement Scheme allows staff to retire before the normal retirement age but to have an off-setting actuarial reduction applied to their retirement benefits. There are currently no applications on hand under the Scheme.

Following the receipt of sanction from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, the Department has recently introduced a voluntary redundancy scheme targeted towards civilian employees (State Industrial Grades) arising from the rationalisation of the brigade structure in the Defence Forces and the reduced requirement for particular grades/skills in the civilian workforce. There are currently no applications on hand under the Scheme. It is not possible at this stage to predict the number of employees that will avail of this particular redundancy scheme between now and 2014.

Single Payment Scheme Payments

167. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will receive their single farm payment; the reason for the delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42540/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): An application under the 2013 Single Payment Scheme was received from the person named in my Department on 11 April 2013.

Single Farm Payment Scheme 50% advance payments will commence on 16 October. Processing of the 2013 application of the person named has recently been finalised and I expect that payment will issue to the person named as soon as possible after that date.

There is no delay in this case as under EU legislation the 16th October is the earliest date on which advance payments under the Single Payment Scheme may issue.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Payments

168. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will have their agri-environment option scheme payment finalised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42546/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named was approved for participation in the Agri-Environment Options Scheme with effect from 1st November 2010 and full payments have issued in respect of the 2010 and 2011

Scheme years.

Under the EU Regulations governing the Scheme and other area-based payment schemes, a comprehensive administrative check, including cross-checks with the Land Parcel Identification System, must be completed before any payment can issue. During these checks in respect of the 2012 Scheme year issues were identified in relation to the Natura action. These issues have now been resolved and officials in my Department are finalising the application of the person named with the intention of issuing payment as soon as possible.

Single Payment Scheme Payments

169. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reasons for an overpayment (details supplied) in County Roscommon; when the person was first informed of the overpayment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42553/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The overpayment in this case initially arose as a result of a discrepancy on a previous year's Single Farm Payment. Following an appeal by the person named the original decision was reversed. When attempting to refund the amount to the person named an additional payment mistakenly issued. This overpayment, including interest, of €1,461.88 was recouped from the 2013 Disadvantaged Area Scheme Payment of the person named. An official in my Department has contacted the person named regarding the matter and a letter explaining the position will also issue to the person named.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Payments

170. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will expedite a disadvantaged area payment in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Limerick; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42625/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): As processing of the 2012 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme application has recently been finalised, payment will issue shortly to the nominated bank account of the person named.

Single Payment Scheme Payments

171. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when single farm payment will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42627/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): As this applicant has no entitlements established under the Single Payment Scheme, there is no payment due to issue to the person named under the 2013 Single Payment Scheme.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Payments

172. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when headage payment will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Clare; and if he will make

a statement on the matter. [42753/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): While the application of the person named under the 2013 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme has been fully processed, the payment cannot issue, as a conditional Garnishee Order (a Court order obtained by a third party) has been received by my Department. Compliance with such a Court Order is not a matter of policy for me to exercise at my discretion, as it is a legal requirement.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Applications

173. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps he will take to have disadvantaged area payment paid to a person (details supplied) in County Longford, immediately, as same is being held up due to digitisation problems; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42757/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named submitted a Single Farm Payment/Disadvantaged Areas Scheme application on 8 May 2013. EU Regulations governing the administration of these schemes require that full and comprehensive administrative checks, including in some cases on-farm inspections, be completed before any payments issue. The application of the person named was selected for a ground eligibility inspection. This inspection has been completed and the results are now being finalised. In the event that any queries arise officials in my Department will shortly be in contact with the person named.

Rural Development Policy

174. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding special recognition being given to island agriculture with the inclusion of a fourth category under the less favoured areas scheme, as well as a specific environment scheme for island farmers and the island sub-thematic programme designed with the new funding programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42782/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): I understand that the Deputy's Question is in the context of the preparation of a new Rural Development Programme. Preparatory work for the next RDP 2014-2020 is well underway. Measures to be included in the new programme will be considered in the context of the governing European Union Regulations, the outcome of the consultation process, the challenges we continue to face in terms of the public finances, and the requirement to balance competing needs both within the agricultural sector and in the economy as a whole.

An initial consultation process was launched in 2012, and written submissions were received from over 80 stakeholders. A second consultation was held in July, where stakeholders attended a full day workshop on the draft SWOT and needs analyses. Based on the outcome of these processes, the drafting of a new programme is being advanced in my Department, and it is intended that further stakeholder consultation will form part of this. Any submissions in relation to island agriculture will be considered in this context and in light of competing demands in the RDP.

Fisheries Protection

175. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to recognise and adjust the one-size-fits-all approach of the EU to national fisheries legislation that is inappropriate for small-scale island fisheries part of the Irish Islands Federation (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42783/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The issue of ending the ‘one size fits all’ approach to fisheries management was a key aspect of the recently concluded negotiations on the reform of the Common Fisheries Policy. In the new CFP Reform we have, for the first time, introduced a regionalised approach to fisheries management. We have moved away from the old system of an EU decision making approach centralised in Brussels. The new policy puts fishermen at the core of developing conservation measures for fisheries in which they are involved and also makes specific references to the needs of small scale fishermen and small offshore islands. I will be working closely with my counterparts in the new regional forums to ensure that decisions that reflect the real issues in our region are developed and implemented.

Many of the stocks fished by island communities are not subject to an EU TAC and quota management regime, although other requirements may be specified in EU law, such as minimum landing sizes. For such non TAC and quota species, management measures applying to Irish registered vessels fishing within inshore waters are developed nationally, though the EU Commission must be consulted before enactment. In the development of such national management measures, I always seek and fully consider any submissions from industry representatives. I am presently seeking views on proposed national management measures for lobster and shrimp. The closing date for submissions is 25 October 2013.

Departmental Staff Data

176. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reduction in staff numbers that will be achieved in 2013 and 2014 from targeted redundancy and early retirement in his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43028/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): 22 staff will have retired from my Department in 2013 without reaching the maximum retirement age. It is estimated that approximately 70 staff will retire in similar circumstances in 2014. The Government has approved the principle of a targeted Voluntary Redundancy Scheme for my Department, should this be required in the progression of the Department’s major re-organisation and re-structuring programme which commenced in 2005. This has been the subject of discussion with the Department of Public Expenditure & Reform during the course of the last year. To-date, the Scheme has not been rolled out for 2013 and it is unlikely that it will impact on numbers in 2014. Our Reform Programme has yielded viable re-deployment opportunities for a significant number of staff who have transferred to other Government Departments/Offices in the last number of years. This process is continuing and will take precedence over any Voluntary Redundancy Scheme.

Education Welfare Service Staff

177. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs when a number of education welfare officers will be appointed to assist schools in County Donegal. [42541/13]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Within the statu-

tory remit of the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB), the Education Welfare Service (EWS) has specific responsibility for the Board's general function to ensure that each child attends a recognised school or otherwise receives a certain minimum education. The EWS has a current staffing complement of 74 officers delivering front line services, 2 of whom have distinct duties in relation to the education of children in places other than recognised schools.

Within that frontline cohort, there are currently two Education Welfare Officers in Donegal; one serving north Donegal and one serving south Donegal.

In addition, the NEWB is in the process of refining and implementing a new strategic approach to service delivery through the integrated working of its three service strands, namely; the Education Welfare Service (EWS); Home School Community Liaison Programme (HSCL – 402 school-based co-ordinators); and School Completion Programme (SCP – €26.456m in funding provided to support 124 school cluster projects and related initiatives). This integrated model of service will provide an enhanced response to the needs of children, families and schools. As part of this process the NEWB is also reviewing the basis on which the EWS was originally configured and a full consultation process is underway with EWS staff and their representatives to reconfigure and optimise service delivery to ensure an appropriate correlation between EWO resources, student population and their needs. I see this strategic national approach as a crucial reform in our efforts to tackle school absenteeism.

Vacancies that arise in staffing front line services for children and young people at risk of early school leaving, are prioritised by my Department in so far as possible, working within Government policy on public service numbers and the moratorium on recruitment.

Early Child Care Education Issues

178. **Deputy Nicky McFadden** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the progress being made in relation to the development of a national early years strategy, regarding the provision of affordable childcare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42643/13]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Since my appointment as Minister I have consistently highlighted the importance of investing and supporting quality interventions in the early years of children's lives. There is an increasing body of Irish and International evidence which quantify the benefits of early year's interventions in terms of improving children's outcomes and in delivering significant economic and societal return to the state.

In line with this commitment I announced the preparation of Ireland's first Early Years Strategy which will represent one of three, more detailed strategies under the high-level Children and Young People's Policy Framework.

I appointed an Expert Advisory Group, chaired by Dr. Eilis Hennessy of UCD to advise my Department on the Strategy and I am happy to advise the Deputy that the Group has now completed its work and I have recently received its Report and recommendations. I expect the Strategy to be published later this year.

My Department currently provides in the region of €260 million annually to provide for three childcare support programmes which ensure that more than 100,000 children have access to quality and affordable childcare. These programmes will be maintained in 2014 and I expect the Early Years Strategy to identify opportunities for more effective utilisation of existing resources and funding, as well as priority areas for further investment through funding availability over the life of the Strategy.

Child Poverty

179. **Deputy Kevin Humphreys** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will provide an update in the area based approach to child poverty; the funding available for same; the date on which the areas and allocations will be announced; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42681/13]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): My Department is implementing the new Area-Based Response to Child Poverty programme which was announced as part of Budget 2013. The programme is being co-funded by philanthropic partners and is expected to have a total funding allocation of up to €29.7 million. The programme is being introduced on foot of the Programme for Government commitment to adopt an area-based approach to child poverty, drawing on best international practice and existing services to break the cycle of child poverty where it is most deeply entrenched and improve the outcomes for children and young people. The programme will build on and continue much of the work of the Prevention and Early Intervention Programme (PEIP) which was also implemented by my Department and co-funded by the Atlantic Philanthropies.

The three existing PEIP sites and a number of additional sites are expected to participate in the new programme. In addition, it is my intention to broaden the impact of the programme by beginning the process of mainstreaming some of the evidence-based programmes which have been positively evaluated and are cost-effective. The establishment of my Department's Child and Family Agency in the coming months will be important to this process.

Applications to participate in the programme were invited from interested not for profit consortia earlier this year. The closing date for receipt of applications was 31st May and fifty applications were received. The immediate priority was to transition appropriate activities funded under PEIP into the new initiative, and this has been progressed as a matter of urgency. Last July the Government approved the transition of the three sites which participated in the PEIP into the new Area Based Approach to Child Poverty programme. My Department is seeking to finalize contracts with the PEIP sites in the near future.

The remaining applications have been reviewed by a Working Group led by my Department, using criteria set out in the application process. An Interdepartmental Project Team, chaired by my Department, will consider these applications, and make proposals to Government later this month for funding under Phase 1 of the initiative.

Early Child Care Education Issues

180. **Deputy Dominic Hannigan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she is planning a strategy for getting Exchequer investment in early childhood care and education towards a minimum of 1% of GDP by 2020; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42691/13]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Department of Children and Youth Affairs was established on 3 June 2011 and the annual spend on childcare related programmes has been in the region of 0.16 per cent of GDP for the years 2011 and 2012. This expenditure does not include expenditure under other early intervention programmes or by other Departments on early year's programmes and services and therefore does not represent the full extent of State expenditure.

My Department supports the provision of early childhood care and education by providing

annually in the region of €260 million to provide for three childcare support programmes that ensure that more than 100,000 children have access to quality and affordable childcare. I have succeeded in maintaining this funding despite the difficult budgetary situation.

As the Deputy may be aware my Department is currently developing Ireland's first Early Years Strategy which will address a range of issues affecting children in their first years of life. I expect the Early Years Strategy, which will be published shortly, to identify opportunities for more effective utilisation of existing resources and funding, as well as priority areas for further investment through funding availability over the life of the Strategy.

While it is my objective to incrementally develop the early child care and education programmes over the term of this Government as resources permit, it is the case that expenditure and funding requirements are generally considered as part of the annual estimates cycle and budgetary process. It is not possible for me at this time to determine what decisions may be taken by Government in the context of future budgets and how these decisions will impact on expenditure allocations for programmes and services falling within the Vote of my Department.

Departmental Staff Retirements

181. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the reduction in public expenditure numbers that will be achieved in 2013 and 2014 from targeted redundancy and early retirement in her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43030/13]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Targeted Voluntary Redundancy Scheme was introduced for certain areas of the Public Service with identified staff surpluses. The Scheme is currently being rolled out in three areas - the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and specific parts of the Health and Education sectors.

My Department and its agencies do not form part of this Scheme.

Mobility Allowance Review

182. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Health if the review of the mobility allowance scheme and the motorised transport grant scheme has been completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42544/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The Government decided in June last that new statutory provisions should be established to provide individual payments to people with severe disabilities who require additional income to address the costs of their mobility needs. An inter-departmental group, chaired by the Department of the Taoiseach, is working to develop detailed proposals for the operation of a new statutory scheme and is due to report back to Government in October.

The Government also decided in June that payments should temporarily continue to be made by the Health Service Executive to those persons currently in receipt of the Mobility Allowance for a further number of months, pending the commencement of new statutory provisions, on the basis that this would prevent hardship, and, on an interim basis, alleviate stress, anxiety and uncertainty among a vulnerable group in society.

The Government is very conscious of the needs of people with a disability who have relied

on the Mobility Allowance and Motorised Transport Grant to support their independence and will take all of this into consideration when making a decision on future arrangements.

Water Fluoridation

183. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide details of the product specification of fluoride which is added to the public drinking water supply; if he will further provide details surrounding the organisation which has given approval to the fluoride product meeting standards for human consumption; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42549/13]

184. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Health his views that the on-going adding of fluoride to the public drinking water supply is justified in view of the fact that 98% of European countries have rejected the practice on health grounds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42550/13]

185. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide details of the action that has been taken to address the European Commission 2011 report on fluoridation which stated that children here are getting unsafe doses of fluoride every day; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42551/13]

186. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Health the precise details of health studies on fluoridation of water which have been carried out by his Department as per the Health Act 1960 which requires that It shall be the duty of future Health Ministers to carry out such studies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42552/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): I propose to take Questions Nos. 183 to 186, inclusive, together.

Water fluoridation and the use of appropriate fluorides is a major plank of public health policy in Ireland in the prevention and management of tooth decay. In 2002 the Forum on Fluoridation, which was established to review this policy, concluded that the fluoridation of public piped water supplies should continue as a public health measure.

Fluoride may be added to public water supplies either in the form of hydrofluosilicic acid complying with the specifications for that substance in Schedule 1 to the Fluoridation of Water Supplies Regulations 2007 (SI 42 of 2007) or in such other form as may be approved by the Minister. Chemifloc Ltd. is the company contracted by the HSE for the supply and delivery of hydrofluosilicic acid for the purpose of water fluoridation. Fluoride is sourced as a primary product in Spain, mined directly from a raw material source - the mineral fluorospar. It goes through a purification process to conform to tightly controlled specifications under the requirements of CEN Standard I.S.EN 12175:2001 to produce hydrofluosilicic acid, specifically used as the mineral additive, fluoride, to water. This process is conducted by a company in Spain - Derivados del Fluor. The fluoride is added to the public water supplies at water treatment plants throughout the country by the local authorities acting as agents for the health authorities as provided for in the Health (Fluoridation of Water Supplies) Act 1960.

The Fluoridation of Water Supplies Regulations 2007 requires that a daily test is carried out at water treatment plants by the local authority water services staff to determine fluoride content. Monthly fluoride testing is carried out by the HSE and the Environmental Protection Agency also carries out testing which requires monitoring of fluoride levels in water supplies.

Some European countries use an alternative systemic approach to fluoridation such as salt

fluoridation or milk fluoridation in their public health programmes. Others use fluoride mouth-rinses and/or tooth-brushing or painting of teeth with fluorides. Additionally, all European countries promote the widespread use of fluoride toothpastes.

The USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, United Kingdom, Israel, Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong, Argentina, Chile, and Colombia actively fluoridate water supplies. Over 204 million people (approximately 66% of the population) in the USA receive fluoridated water with coverage having increased by around 24 million people between 2002 and 2012.

No claim associating water fluoridation at the optimal level with negative health effects has been substantiated. A known side effect at this level is enamel fluorosis, which is a cosmetic or aesthetic condition which refers to the way teeth look and is generally easy to treat. This is in contrast to the treatment of tooth decay which may on occasion involve the use of general anaesthesia and hospitalisation. Fluorosis has been rigorously monitored in Ireland and changes in fluorosis levels were responded to by lowering the levels of fluoride in water from 2007 and advising on the appropriate use of fluoride toothpaste.

The European Commission Report 2011 to which the Deputy refers is presumably the Report of the Scientific Committee on Health and Environmental Risks (SCHER). It states that a narrow margin exists in children between achieving the beneficial effects of fluoride in reducing dental decay and the potential adverse effect of dental fluorosis. This is true regardless of the source of fluoride, whether from water fluoridation or other sources, such as ingested toothpaste. The maximum fluoride concentration allowed in fluoridated water in Ireland is 0.8 mg/l. The SCHER conclusions derive from concentrations exceeding 0.8mg/l; 1.5mg/l and 3mg/l. It cannot be inferred from these conclusions that children here are exposed to unsafe doses of fluoride on a daily basis.

The impact of water fluoridation on caries levels in Ireland has been regularly assessed in both national and local surveys since its introduction in the mid 1960s. The national studies which have been undertaken are Children's Dental Health in Ireland 1984; Oral Health of Irish Adults 1989-1990; Oral Health of Irish Adults 2000-2002; North South Survey of Children's Oral Health 2002. In addition, regional studies were undertaken in the 1990s and a cross border study in 2006. All show a substantial benefit of fluoride in terms of a reduction in tooth decay. At present a research project "Fluoride and Caring for Children's Teeth" (FACCT) is being conducted by the Oral Health Services Research Centre, University College Cork and supported by the HSE.

The Irish Expert Body on Fluorides and Health, established in 2004, continuously monitors new and emerging issues on fluoride and its effects. It advises that the balance of scientific evidence worldwide confirms that water fluoridation, at the optimal level, does not cause any ill effects and protects the oral health of the population. The opinion of the Expert Body is supported by major international scientifically validated reviews. The effects of fluoride on health and related matters are kept under constant review.

Services for People with Disabilities

187. **Deputy Michael Colreavy** asked the Minister for Health the legislative basis for placing a person of unsound mind in a group home; the basis for setting charges relating to the care of such a person; the procedures used to ensure the proper and accountable management of the person's financial resources. [42555/13]

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 residential services for people with a disability. Charges for those in receipt of long-stay residential care are governed by Regulations made under section 53 of the Health Act 1970 and supported by national implementation guidelines published by the HSE.

In May of this year I launched National Standards for Residential Services for Children and Adults with Disabilities. The Standards seek to ensure that residential services have all the necessary safeguards and protections for people with disabilities as well as ensuring that the unique and complex needs of each individual person are met in an appropriate manner by service providers and their staff.

In relation to access to financial accounts of service users, the standards specifically state that each person should be supported to take responsibility for their own financial affairs. The standards request service providers to ensure service users have easy access to personal monies and control their own financial affairs in accordance with their wishes. In addition, where service users need support to manage their financial affairs, they may nominate a person to be entrusted with this responsibility. Nominated persons are required to keep an account of all monies spent and if such persons are also staff members, they are also accountable to the person in charge as well as the service user concerned.

The regulations required to underpin these standards in law are now complete and the scheme of registration and inspection of residential services for people with disabilities is expected to commence in the coming weeks.

Ambulance Service Provision

188. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Health what the pre-hospital emergency key performance indicators are for the region containing County Meath for the past five years; and what the ambulance services KPI's are for the region containing County Meath for the past five years [42612/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): 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. In relation to your query regarding pre-hospital emergency KPIs for the region containing County Meath, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy.

HSE Reports

189. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health if he intends to publish the details of the review of the national service users executive; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42619/13]

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

Health Strategies

190. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Health if he will consider providing defibrillators in public places for use by the public in emergency cases (details supplied). [42630/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The Second Stage of the Public Access to Defibrillators Bill, which sets out the requirement to provide defibrillators in a range of settings and for events which have a regular attendance in excess of 100 persons per day, was passed in the Seanad in June 2013. The Minister has requested the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) to undertake a Health Technology Assessment (HTA) on the practical elements of the introduction of a public access defibrillation programme and Department of Health officials have met with HIQA to discuss the procedures around a HTA.

The Health Technology Assessment has now commenced and will be concluded in 2014.

Health Services Access

191. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment will be arranged urgently in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Laois; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42633/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): Improving access to outpatient services is a key priority for the Government. Collaborating with individual hospitals, the SDU, together with the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) and the HSE, has developed the outpatient waiting list minimum dataset. This allows data to be submitted to the NTPF from hospitals on a weekly basis and, for the first time, outpatient data is available on www.ntpf.ie. For 2013, a maximum waiting time target has been set of 12 months for a first time consultant-led outpatient appointment and this is reflected in the HSE service plan. The SDU and the NTPF will work closely with hospitals towards achievement of the maximum waiting time.

Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she would be in the best position to take the matter up with the consultant and hospital involved. In relation to the specific hospital appointment query raised by the Deputy, as this is a service matter it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Cochlear Implants

192. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health further to his meeting with the happy new ear campaign, if he will ensure that bilateral cochlear implants for children are rolled out without further delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42642/13]

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.

Cochlear Implants

193. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the provisions being put in place for the implementation of a programme to provide for bilateral cochlear implants. [42662/13]

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.

Hospital Trusts

194. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health further to the publication of the establishment of hospital groups as a transition to independent hospital trusts, if he will outline in precise terms the way patients who are currently served by the Mater Hospital in Dublin will in future be served; if it is planned to disrupt or terminate existing consultant-patient relationships or to reassign current patients to different consultants; and if he will set out the timescale that is being worked to. [42667/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The hospital groups are configured so as to facilitate the delivery of safe, high-quality patient care in a cost effective manner. I wish to assure the Deputy that appropriate patient care pathways will not be affected by the establishment of hospital groups.

In terms of timescale, within a year of establishment, the new hospital groups will be required to produce a strategic plan describing how they will provide more efficient and effective patient services; how they will reorganise these services to provide optimal care to the populations they serve; and how they will achieve maximum integration and synergy with other groups and all other health services, particularly primary care and community based services.

Hospital Trusts

195. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health further to the publication of the establishment of hospital groups as a transition to independent hospital trusts, if expectant mothers on the north side of Dublin will continue to have the option of attending the National Maternity Hospital for all maternity services. [42668/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): Patients will not be restricted in their choice as a result of the establishment of Hospital Groups. Expectant mothers may be referred by their

GP to the hospital of their choice.

Accident and Emergency Departments Waiting Times

196. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health the maximum permissible time that a person will be left on a trolley at Beaumont Hospital accident and emergency department; the maximum recorded time that a person has been left on a trolley at Beaumont accident and emergency department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42694/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): In relation to the particular patient query raised by the Deputy, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy in this matter.

Hospital Waiting Lists

197. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on each waiting list to see each speciality at Beaumont Hospital; the average time spent on the list waiting to see a specialist; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42695/13]

198. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health the target accident and emergency waiting time at Beaumont Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42696/13]

199. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health the current average waiting time for patients waiting to be treated in Beaumont Hospital accident and emergency; the steps being taken to reduce the waiting times; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42697/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 197 to 199, inclusive, together.

As these are service matters, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy.

Medical Card Applications

200. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Health the average waiting times for processing of new medical card applications for applicants from County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42754/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): The HSE collates data on a national level in relation to waiting times, and not at a lower level.

The Primary Care Reimbursement Service aims to process all complete medical card applications within 15 days and is currently processing 94.5% of applications within that time frame.

The length of time that it takes for a client to receive a decision on their medical card application depends on whether the client submitted a complete application, and if not, how quickly the applicant responds to the subsequent request for additional information. Applications that remain in process outside of the 15 day period, due to incomplete applications and where the applicant is engaging with the process, are facilitated so that eligibility may be retained in the interim and, once the documentation received, their assessment is prioritised without delay.

This process applies to renewal applications also.

If a person is a new applicant presenting with an urgent medical need or an urgent medical need in respect of their dependant(s), the HSE will facilitate a prioritised assessment of eligibility once the applicant has provided all the information necessary.

Medicinal Products Prices

201. **Deputy Emmet Stagg** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the Health Service Executive have sanctioned a price increase for Puri Nethol which is used by those suffering from chrons disease and cancer patients, which has seen the monthly prescription go up from €47 to €144; his views on whether this goes against his campaign to reduce the cost of medicines and will he have this decision reversed. [42772/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): My Department and the HSE have implemented a medicines pricing policy which aims to reduce the prices for medicines/improve value for money whilst also maintaining continuity of supply and availability of essential medicines. These aims are balanced in an attempt to maximise public health gain from available resources. As part of the pricing policies there has been a price freeze (i.e. no price increases allowed except in exceptional circumstances) for a number of years.

Over the last few years thousands of price reductions on medicines have occurred. For example, the price of over 500 different presentations of various medicines will reduce by between 5% and 29% on 1st November 2013 as a consequence of agreements reached with the Irish Pharmaceutical Healthcare Association (IPHA) and the Association of Pharmaceutical Manufacturers of Ireland (APMI).

Occasionally, price increases are required to maintain supplies of specific essential medicines. However, the HSE each year refuses a significant number of requests for price increases. Less than 50 price increases were allowed in the 8 years between 2006 and 2013.

In October 2012, the manufacturer of Purinethol informed the HSE that, following an examination of the viability of a number of product lines, it had decided to increase the price of Purinethol in Ireland and a number of other EU countries (including Germany, UK, Denmark and Finland).

The HSE engaged with the manufacturer in an attempt to negotiate a reduced price, however, the manufacturer was unwilling to do so.

As the manufacturer is the sole supplier of the product in Ireland, the HSE accepted the price increase in order to safeguard the supply of this essential medicine. The HSE granted the price increase with effect from 1 March 2013. Despite this increase, there is still only one supplier of the drug in the Irish market, which suggests that the HSE made the right decision in allowing the price increase in order to maintain supply.

It is important to note that the Irish price for Purinethol is not out of line with international prices.

Health Services Expenditure

202. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding decreased funding for Kerry Parents and Friends Association in budget 2014; and if he will make

a statement on the matter. [42779/13]

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.

HSE Regional Service Plans

203. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the provision of 24 hour medical service on island communities as part of the Irish Islands Federation (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42781/13]

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

Departmental Staff Retirements

204. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health the reduction in public expenditure numbers that will be achieved in 2013 and 2014 from targeted redundancy and early retirement in his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43037/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): There are currently no targeted redundancy or early retirement packages in place in the Department of Health. To date in 2013 all staff who retired have been over 60 years of age or have retired due to ill health. There is no mechanism to predict how many early retirements there may be in 2014 as a result of the grace period for pension purposes under the Haddington Road Agreement.

Road Safety Issues

205. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will, as a matter of urgency, make available the required funding for the provision of a much needed pedestrian crossing on an area (details supplied) in County Kerry; if he will accept that this is major health and safety issue and take into consideration the fact that there is a significant general pedestrian usage apart from school generated pedestrian traffic in this busy tourist village; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42543/13]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads is the statutory responsibility of each local authority, in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from local authorities own resources supplemented by State road grants. The initial selection and prioritisation of works to be funded is also a matter for the local authority.

In July this year local authorities were invited by the National Roads Authority to submit applications for consideration for funding in 2014 under the Low Cost Safety Improvement Scheme. The Council may wish to prioritise this project and include it in its applications for consideration under this grant category when they are submitted in due course. Alternatively, it is also open to Kerry County Council to fund this project from its Discretionary Grant.

It is also important to reiterate that the role of Exchequer grants for regional and local roads is to supplement Councils like Kerry County Council in their own resources spending in this area and it is open to the Council to undertake this work from its own resources.

State Properties

206. **Deputy Derek Nolan** asked the Minister for Transport; Tourism and Sport if he will define the authority upon which State owned transport companies dispose of property assets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42605/13]

208. **Deputy Derek Nolan** asked the Minister for Transport; Tourism and Sport if his Department requires State owned transport companies to consult with stakeholders before disposing of property assets or define properties in respect of their strategic, long term, infrastructure needs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42607/13]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 206 and 208 together.

The transport companies under my aegis are the CIÉ group of companies and the Railway Procurement Agency. In the case of these agencies, the disposal of property assets is not subject to any specific authority from the Minister and no requirement is placed on them to consult with stakeholders. In the case of CIÉ, core assets such as rail lines, bus depots and other assets required to meet its statutory obligation to provide transport services may not be disposed of. There are also specific provisions in Section 21 of the Transport Act 1950, as amended by the Transport Acts 1958 and 1963, in relation to railway lines over which the services of trains have been terminated at any time.

The disposal of any asset with an anticipated value of over €150,000 by any State agency must comply with the guidelines laid down in the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies.

Public Transport Issues

207. **Deputy Derek Nolan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the criteria and procedures upon which State owned transport companies assess the suitability of property for disposal by sale or long term lease; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42606/13]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The criteria and procedures upon which State owned transport companies assess the suitability of property for disposal by sale or long term lease is a matter for the agencies themselves. I have forwarded your question to the transport companies for direct reply to you, if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days please contact my private office.

Question No. 208 answered with Question No. 206.

Road Projects Issues

209. **Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if a pedestrian flyover will be provided at the southbound carriageway of the N11 at Stillorgan near the junction with Lower Kilmacud Road, Dublin; and if he will make a statement

on the matter. [42687/13]

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 don't receive a reply within 10 working days.

Road Projects Issues

210. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport in view of the fact that funding to date for the Adare bypass has been in excess of €4.3 million, if he will provide a breakdown of the overall amount of money spent; the expenditure over the various parts, route selection, oral hearings and so on for both the 2005 and 2009 projects. [42773/13]

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

Rural Transport Services Provision

211. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding the continuation of services provided through the rural transport programme to island communities (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42774/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Alan Kelly) (Deputy Alan Kelly): The National Transport Authority (NTA) has responsibility for implementing the restructuring of the Rural Transport Programme (RTP) announced by me on 9 July 2013. The purpose of the restructuring of the RTP is to protect the provision of rural transport services into the future.

I am advised by the NTA that during the restructuring of the RTP, their priority is to ensure the uninterrupted continuation of existing RTP services, meeting the needs of those affected by social exclusion during this time of change. In this regard the NTA's focus is to move the existing RTP services into contracted services with the NTA, whether directly with the operators, or with the fleet owning groups. At the same time the NTA will examine existing contracted services to ensure that they are meeting current demands. Based on the current funding available, the NTA has no plans to modify or reduce specific services. This includes the services currently provided under the Programme to island communities.

Public Sector Staff Issues

212. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reduction in public service numbers that will be achieved in 2013 and 2014 from targeted redundancy and early retirement in his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43038/13]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): There is currently no targeted redundancy scheme available to staff in my Department. In the period up to 31st August 2014 seven staff in my Department will reach the retirement age of 65 years.

Under section 9(2)(a) of the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2013, staff in my Department who retire by end August 2014 and whose pay has been reduced due to 1st July 2013 pay cuts, will have their pension and lump sum calculated by reference to the pay rates in force before the pay cuts of 1 July 2013 were implemented. This cohort of retirees will, however, be subject to the new Public Service Pension Reduction on their pensions with effect from 1 July 2013, where those pensions exceed €32,500.