

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 8, inclusive, answered orally.

Budget 2014

9. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Social Protection the impact of budget 2014 on poverty. [43364/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I am keenly aware that the expenditure reductions in this Budget will impact on some social welfare recipients. However, the lower adjustment of €226 million, rather than the €440 million originally requested of the Department means I have protected the weekly social welfare payments upon which people depend as well as crucial supplementary payments such as the Fuel Allowance, the Electricity/Gas Allowance, Free Travel, the Half-Rate Carer's Allowance and the Respite Care Grant. Child Benefit rates have also been protected in this Budget. As part of the Budgetary deliberative process, the Department has analysed, in so far as possible, the distributive and poverty impact of possible welfare changes to all welfare recipients including different family types including those with children. The Department is now preparing an analysis of the Budget 2014 tax and welfare packages. This Social Impact Assessment will include an analysis of the distributive and poverty impacts of these changes on different family types as well as the impact on at risk of poverty levels. I will be examining the analysis when it is finalised and I will publish it in due course.

As I have already outlined, Budget 2014 continues the process of repairing the public finances while protecting the welfare safety net and providing a pathway back to work for job-seekers.

The principal reason I have been able to protect these crucial welfare supports is the Department's role in helping people back to work, which in turn has seen the Live Register fall. Getting people back to work is the most effective way of reducing welfare expenditure – and we are doing it. Every 10,000 we help off the Live Register saves around €90 million in welfare expenditure per annum. But more importantly the best route out of poverty is through employment.

Since coming to office, I have focused on transforming the Department from the passive benefits provider of old to an active, engaged and focused employment service which is helping people to avail of education and training opportunities and ultimately to get back to work.

This work continues apace and the increase in the number of people in the workforce proves that this approach, combined with the work of my colleagues in Government, is bearing fruit.

- The numbers in work rose by 33,800 in the year to the second quarter of 2013.

- The Live Register is down by 20,000 over the past year, and will shortly fall below 400,000 for the first time since May 2009.

Next year, the Department will spend €1.08 billion on work, training and education places and related supports for jobseekers – an increase of almost €85 million on our projected spend this year.

During Ireland's Presidency of the EU Council, I oversaw negotiations on the Youth Guarantee, which will be introduced across Europe from next year.

The Guarantee will be a youth employment stimulus, offering good-quality work, training and educational opportunities for young people.

This budget will help more people back to work, reduce the overall welfare spend as part of the sustained effort to repair the public finances, and ensure the safety net remains firmly in place for those who need it most.

Social Welfare Code Review

10. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Social Protection her views on the anomalies in the family income support system; if she has any plans to rectify these; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43333/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The family income supplement (FIS) is an in-work 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 "hours worked" eligibility criterion has been reduced significantly since the introduction of the scheme in 1984, from 30 hours per week to 19 hours per week in 1996. Further reducing the "hours worked" requirement would have expenditure implications. It is also important that FIS does not inadvertently subsidise unsustainably low earnings or encourage employers to offer minimal hours of employment.

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. The Group is currently examining the issue of working age supports. In this regard the Group is considering how employment incentives might be improved. Among the issues being examined by the Group is the role in-work supports, such as FIS, should play in facilitating people to move from welfare into work.

Community Employment Schemes Eligibility

11. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will justify the rationale in changes to community employment schemes which have resulted, for example, in golf clubs having to let go staff where there was a strong history of training and subsequent employment. [43680/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Community Employment (CE) is an active labour market programme which helps long-term unemployed people and other vulnerable groups to re-enter the workforce by breaking their experience of unemployment through a return to work routine. The programme assists them to enhance and develop both their technical and personal skills which can then be used in the workplace.

The CE programme is sponsored by groups wishing to benefit the local community, namely voluntary organisations and public bodies involved in not-for-profit activities.

A CE project application submitted for approval by sponsoring organisations include a work programme to be undertaken by participants and an outline of the training qualifications to be provided over the timeframe. The proposal will also provide key performance indicators for the project relating to qualifications provided and progression into employment. The Department is interested in approving projects which may last from 1 to 3 years and support will always be conditional upon annual review and the availability of state funds.

Projects which are eligible are those which:

- Respond to an identified community need;
- Provide development for participants in areas involving heritage, arts, culture, tourism, sport and the environment;
- Have the agreement of relevant trade unions;
- Do not displace or replace existing jobs;
- Offer valuable work experience for participants.

Projects which are not eligible are those which:

- Are politically or commercially orientated;
- Involve a trading element;
- Enhance private property;
- Result in private gain.

Community Employment is not designed to assist private businesses or clubs. New applications by golf clubs for CE participants were stopped in December 2005.

European Court of Justice Rulings

12. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Social Protection when the Government proposes to act on the decision of the Court of Justice of the European Union on 25 April 2013, which found that the Government is liable for the shortfall in pension funds for the Waterford Crystal workers; the estimated cost to the State of this decision; and if she will make a statement

on the matter. [43351/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The ruling by the European Court of Justice was in response to a reference by the High Court seeking clarification of the interpretation of European law emanating from EU Directive 2008/94EC on the protection of employees in the event of the insolvency of their employer.

Following the ECJ ruling, the matter will now revert to the High Court for consideration. Given this matter remains before the courts, it would not be appropriate for me to comment further on any aspects of or possible issues arising from the case at this time.

Careful and detailed consideration is of course being given to the ruling of the European Court of Justice, and will be given to the outcomes of the case before the High Court.

13. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Social Protection her views on whether changes made in recent years to the one parent family payment create a disincentive to take up employment; her plans to change this; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43336/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The number of one-parent family payment (OFP) recipients stood at 80,823 in August 2013. The expenditure on the OFP scheme was €1.06 billion in 2012 and is estimated to be €935 million in 2013. Currently 36% of OFP recipients are employed.

Despite significant levels of state spending on one-parent families, the results have been poor in terms of tackling the poverty and social exclusion among them. The on-going reforms to the OFP scheme are predicated on activation and on getting people back into the workforce once their children have reached an appropriate age.

The reforms aim to provide the necessary supports to lone parents to help them to participate in education and training, enter the workforce and, ultimately, attain financial independence.

When lone parents reaches the end of their entitlement to OFP as a result of the reforms, there are a number of income support options available to them. These include Jobseeker's Allowance (JA) and Family Income Supplement (FIS). If the individual moves to the JA scheme they then have access to the full set of Intreo services to assist them to develop their skills and enter employment. If they are entitled to the FIS, this payment incentivises them to retain or increase their employment.

In order to ease the transition to the new payment structure for lone parents with young children, a special Jobseeker's allowance transition arrangement was put in place in July 2013. This exempts previous OFP recipients with children under 14 years of age from certain conditionality within the Jobseeker's Allowance scheme, including the requirement to be genuinely seeking and available for full-time work. Recipients of Jobseeker's allowance under this transition arrangement are required to engage with the full Intreo services to help them prepare for employment, while balancing their caring responsibilities. I am also pleased that I have the agreement of my colleague the Minister for Children and Youth to a new strand of the Childcare Education and Training Support Scheme which will be available for certain CE (Community Employment) participants. The new strand will be primarily for children under five of existing or new participants on the scheme who have been on the Live Register or are Lone parents. Officials from both Departments will now work closely together to agree the precise terms of the scheme.

Rent Supplement Scheme Applications

14. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will allow leeway in the rent cap in respect of persons (details supplied) in County Dublin; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43413/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): According to the records of this Department the persons concerned are a family with five dependent children. A rent supplement application from an applicant with five dependent children is assessed on a case by case basis, as a maximum rent limit is not stipulated within the maximum rent limit guidelines for such cases. It is open to the persons concerned to contact their local community welfare service to discuss the options available to them.

Budget 2014

15. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will ensure that child benefit is retained at its current level; that adult social welfare rates are retained at current levels; that family income supplement is maintained in its current form; if she will seek to raise the rates for the back to school clothing and footwear allowance and to maintain the budget for the school meals programme. [38874/13]

30. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Social Protection the disruptive impact of the budget 2014. [43363/13]

59. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the extent to which she expects to be in a position to protect the most vulnerable in society such as the elderly, those with special needs, families and children; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43306/13]

63. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she has equality proofed any budget cuts to her Department; if such an analysis will be made publicly available; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43361/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I propose to take Question Numbers 15, 30, 59 & 63 together.

The Expenditure Report 2013 published by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform last December provided for additional new expenditure reduction measures of €440 million to be achieved in 2014 in the Department of Social Protection budget.

Again this year I sought to minimise the impact of the necessary adjustments to welfare expenditure and to protect as far as possible key income supports. This amount was lowered by Government to €226 million in new expenditure reductions announced yesterday. An additional €30 million in savings will be made through additional fraud and control measures in 2014, while €34 million will be saved through increased efficiencies and lower than expected demand on some schemes, bringing the Department's cumulative adjustment on social protection expenditure to €290 million.

I am all too aware that reductions of €226 million will still impact on, and cause difficulties for, some social welfare recipients. However, the lower adjustment means I have protected the State Pension, Carer's Allowance, Disability Allowance and all other weekly social welfare payments upon which people depend.

I have also protected crucial supplementary supports for pensioners, carers and people with disabilities, such as the Fuel Allowance, the Electricity/Gas Allowance, Free Travel, the Half-Rate Carer's Allowance and the Respite Care Grant.

Child Benefit rates have also been protected in this Budget, and will remain a vital universal support for all families and all children.

As part of the Budgetary deliberative process, my Department has analysed, in so far as possible, the distributive and poverty impact of possible welfare changes to all welfare recipients including different family types, including those with children.

My Department is now preparing an analysis of the Budget 2014 tax and welfare packages. This Social Impact Assessment will include an analysis of the distributive and poverty impacts of these changes on different family types as well as the impact on at risk of poverty levels. Social impact assessment is an evidence-based methodology which uses a tax/welfare simulation model developed by the Economic and Social Research Institute to estimate the likely distributive effects of budgetary measures on income and social inequalities. I will be examining the analysis when it is finalised and I will publish it in due course.

Fuel Allowance Payments

16. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she is concerned by recent reports from the St. Vincent de Paul charity that it is paying more than €10 million a year to gas and electricity companies to help families pay their energy bills; the plans her Department has to combat fuel poverty in the future; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43320/13]

27. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Social Protection the impact of budget 2014 on fuel poverty. [43365/13]

40. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will consider raising the winter fuel allowance in view of the fact that it is failing to cover rising energy prices, leaving many homes struggling to pay bills; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43411/13]

132. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of weeks per year the fuel allowance is paid; the amount paid; those who qualify for this allowance; if an extension of this scheme by one week for recipients in 2012-13 will be included in the 2013-14 scheme; if she proposes any other changes to the scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44037/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 16, 27, 40 and 132 together.

I am very aware of the issues raised by the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. Energy poverty is a factor of income, energy prices and the thermal efficiency of the home. The most cost-effective means of protecting households from energy poverty is to improve the thermal efficiency of the home. The Better Energy Warmer Homes scheme (BEWH), administered by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI), funds energy efficiency improvements in the homes of the elderly and vulnerable, making the homes more comfortable, healthier and more cost effective to run. The Department is working with the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources and other Departments and agencies on the implementation of the Energy Affordability Strategy.

We had many difficult choices to make in the recent Budget. I considered the fuel allowance and the electricity and gas allowances as part of the household benefits package to be vital supports to be protected. These allowances are paid as a contribution to the energy costs of the

household. They are not intended to meet these costs in full.

This year we will spend over €182 million on the free electricity/gas allowance for over 410,000 customers. In addition, some 410,000 customers will also receive the fuel allowance of €20 per week for the winter months (26 weeks) from October to April, at a cost of €223 million. Over 200,000 customers receive both the electricity/gas allowance and the fuel allowance from the Department, contributing €940 per household towards their energy costs.

The fuel allowance is paid to long-term jobseekers and one-parent family payment recipients as well as people in receipt of disability allowance, invalidity pension and some people in receipt of the State pension. The allowance is subject to a means test and is paid only to those who live alone or with certain exempted people. Full details on the criteria for the scheme are available on the Department's website *www.welfare.ie*.

In April 2013, the Department paid an additional week of fuel allowance. This arrangement was specific to the 2012/2013 fuel season due to the unusually cold weather being experienced at the time.

Under the supplementary welfare allowance scheme, exceptional needs payments may be made to help meet an essential, once-off cost which customers are unable to meet out of their own resources; this may include exceptional heating costs. More than 3,000 customers are currently in receipt of a special heating supplement, paid to assist people with special heating needs because of ill health or infirmity.

Farm Assist Scheme Payments

17. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will consider reversing the changes she made to farm assist in view of the fact that it has had a serious negative affect on the income levels of already struggling farming families; if she has carried out an analysis of the impact of the changes on these families; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43769/13]

32. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she has carried out an analysis on the impact her changes to farm assist with respect to income disregards have had on farmers; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43770/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I propose to answer Question numbers 17 & 32 together.

The farm assist scheme is based on jobseeker's allowance. It was introduced in 1999 to replace 'Smallholders Unemployment Assistance' for low income farmers, without the requirement to be available for and genuinely seeking work. Farm assist recipients retain all the advantages of the jobseeker's allowance scheme such as retention of secondary benefits and access to activation programmes.

Recent changes to the scheme have brought it into closer alignment with the jobseeker's allowance scheme's treatment of self-employed persons.

Farm assist is a flexible payment and any farmer experiencing lower levels of income or cash-flow issues can ask his/her local social welfare / Intreo office to review the level of means applying to his/her claim.

The assessment of means for the purpose of qualifying for farm assist is designed to reflect

the actual net income and looks at gross income, less any expenses necessarily incurred, from farming. Income and expenditure figures for the preceding year are generally used as an indicator of the expected position in the following year. However, account is taken of any exceptional circumstances so as to ensure that the assessment accurately reflects the current situation. In the case of new entrants or persons changing from one type of farming to another the assessment looks at all expected annual income and is based on normal output and costs appropriate to items such as normal stock levels, capacity, and market trends.

It may be noted that payments received under the Agri-Environment Options Scheme or Special Area of Conservation schemes are assessed separately from other farm income. With regard to this income the first €2,540 is disregarded, then 50% of the balance and related expenses are disregarded - with the balance being assessed as means.

No formal analysis of the impact of recent changes has been carried out but the scheme is kept under review. In addition the Department regularly discusses the scheme with the Irish Farmers Association. There are no plans to change the current scheme criteria.

Civil Registration Legislation

18. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Social Protection her plans to amend the Civil Registration Act 2004; if she intends to close off the sham marriage loophole in the interim; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43135/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): On the 19 July, 2013 the Cabinet approved the drafting of the Civil Registration (Amendment) Bill 2013.

The Bill will provide for a wide range of issues relating to the registration of life events in the State. Representations and recommendations have been made by various groups and organisations since the enactment of the Civil Registration Act 2004 and this Bill seeks to address these issues. The General Register Office, which administers the Civil Registration Service, has identified areas where legislative amendments are required to streamline the service to the general public.

One of the issues that will be provided for in the legislation is the introduction of measures to combat marriages of convenience by making such marriages more difficult to contract in the future.

As previously stated in earlier answers to this question, marriages of convenience, or “sham marriages” are defined as marriages which are entered into for the purpose of one of the parties gaining an automatic right of residency based on marriage to a person who already has a right of residency.

The matter is a complex one and the issues involved are primarily for my colleague the Minister for Justice and Equality. EU citizens and their families have the right to move and reside freely within the territories of the Member States. These rights also apply to non-EU national spouses of EU nationals following the ruling of the European Court of Justice in the Metock case on 25th July 2008.

Officials in the Department are working with the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel on drafting the Bill and I hope to publish this legislation early next year.

It should also be noted there are, at present, guidelines for registrars for marriage notifications which include procedures for the verification of identity and marital status which can assist in the prevention of marriages of convenience.

Jobseeker's Allowance Eligibility

19. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Social Protection her views on whether the rule which provides that someone working more than three days a week is automatically excluded from receiving jobseeker's benefit-allowance constitutes a poverty trap; her plans to abolish this rule; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43338/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The jobseeker's benefit and jobseeker's allowance schemes provide income support for people who have lost work and are unable to find alternative full-time employment. The Revised Estimates for the Department provide for expenditure on the jobseeker's schemes of €3.66 billion in 2013.

It is a fundamental qualifying condition of both schemes that a person must be fully unemployed for 4 in any period of 7 consecutive days. Where a person takes up employment the part-time job incentive scheme may, subject to scheme criteria, support them in making such a transition to employment. The scheme allows persons who are long-term unemployed to take up part-time employment for less than 24 hours per week and receive a weekly income supplement. Participants in this scheme are expected to continue to make efforts to find full-time work.

It is recognised that a changing labour market has resulted in a move away from the more traditional work patterns, resulting in an increase in the number of persons employed for less than a full week. This is an important policy issue for the Department but any changes to the current criteria could have significant cost implications.

The Advisory Group on Tax and Social Welfare, which has already reported to me on a number of important policy areas, is now looking at the whole area of atypical work and I look forward to their recommendations on this issue later this year.

Appointments to State Boards

20. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Social Protection the procedure that is followed by her Department when appointing members of the public to State boards or other agencies under the aegis of her Department; if she will outline all appointments made by her to all boards or agencies since March 2011; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43329/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The statutory bodies operating under the aegis of the Department of Social Protection are the Citizens Information Board, the Pensions Board, the Pensions Ombudsman (which does not have a board) and the Social Welfare Tribunal.

Citizens Information Board

The procedures followed when appointing members to the Citizens Information Board (CIB) are in accordance with the Revised Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies where Departments invite expressions of interest from members of the public for vacancies on the boards or bodies under their aegis.

These new arrangements involve using a centralised application service provided by the Public Appointments Service (PAS) to manage the expressions of interest received. Interested parties are required to submit an online application form, a self-assessment of their skills and/or experience in a number of identified competency areas, a curriculum vitae and a covering letter.

The legislative provisions governing appointments are contained in the Comhairle Act 2000,

the Citizens Information Act 2007 and the Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2011.

There have been three appointments to the Board since March 2011. One member was appointed with effect from 7 September 2011. This followed an advertisement for expressions of interest from suitably qualified and experienced individuals on the Department's website, www.welfare.ie, which invited applicants to register their interest through the Public Appointments Service (PAS) website, www.publicjobs.ie. 172 applications were received through PAS and, following a selection process, the appointment was made in accordance with the legislation governing appointments to the Board.

The other two appointments did not require public advertisement. One was appointed as the Department's representative to the Board on 1 November 2011 and the other was appointed as the CIB's staff representative on 5 November 2012.

Pensions Board

No appointments have been advertised or made by me to the Pensions Board since I took office in March 2011.

The Public Service Reform Programme provided for a critical review of the integration of the regulatory functions of the Pensions Board with the Financial Regulator and the merging of the Pensions Ombudsman with the Financial Services Ombudsman. The recommendations arising out of the Critical Review on the Pensions Board were approved by Government in April 2013 and were provided for in the Social Welfare and Pensions Act, 2013.

It was recommended that the governance structure of the Pensions Board be restructured with two distinct arms as follows:

- Oversight of the Pensions Board will be undertaken by a three person body called the Pensions Authority. This will consist of a Chairperson and two officials from the Department of Social Protection and the Department of Finance.
- A separate unpaid Pensions Council, with a majority of members representing consumer interests, will be established to advise me on pension's policy.

I expect to appoint the Chairperson of the Authority shortly and the new structure should be operational by end 2013. Expressions of interest for the appointment to the Pensions Council will be processed through the PAS system in the coming months and I expect the Council to be operational by the end of the year.

Social Welfare Tribunal

The Board of the Social Welfare Tribunal consists of a Chairperson and four ordinary members, two of whom are nominated by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) and two by the Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC), in accordance with legislation.

There have been 6 appointments to the board since March 2011. One of the ICTU members of the Tribunal resigned in 2011 and, on ICTU's nomination, a replacement member was appointed from 24 October 2011.

All appointments were due for renewal on 4 October 2012. Four members of the previous board and one new person nominated by IBEC were appointed to the new board by me, effective from 5 October 2012. None of these positions were filled on foot of public applications due to the structure of the Tribunal. The board is made up of individuals deemed to be representative of both employers and employees.

Social Welfare Benefits Eligibility

21. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Social Protection the steps which she is taking to assist self-employed persons to avail of social assistance payments; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43138/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Details of the social assistance payments offered by the Department are widely publicised, for example on the departmental website www.welfare.ie, and information is also available through social welfare local offices.

Self-employed persons are liable for pay related social insurance (PRSI) at a rate of 4%, which entitles them to access long-term benefits such as state pension (contributory) and widow's, widower's or surviving civil partner's pension (contributory). This compares to employees in respect of whom a combined 14.75% rate, under full-rate PRSI Class A, is paid giving entitlement to the full range of social insurance benefits.

In general, where persons do not qualify for social insurance benefits they may claim means tested social assistance payments. For example, any person of working age who does not qualify for jobseeker's benefit may claim means tested jobseeker's allowance. Subject to means and other qualifying conditions, self-employed persons may claim jobseeker's allowance if their business ceases or there is reduced demand for their services. Typically over 80% of jobseeker's allowance claims from self-employed persons have been awarded over recent years.

It may be noted that previously self-employed persons in receipt of jobseeker's allowance have access to the full range of activation measures available through the State. Given the scale of unemployment levels, the key objective of activation policy and labour market initiatives is to offer assistance to those most in need of support in securing work and achieving financial self-sufficiency. However, many services are available to the formerly self-employed who are not in receipt of a social welfare payment.

Job Initiatives

22. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will introduce a facility to apply to participate on Gateway and Tús. [43376/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The objective of Gateway is to assist the personal and social development of participants by providing short-term work opportunities with county and city councils with the objective of bridging the gap between unemployment and re-entering the workforce. Gateway is a joint initiative between this Department and county and city councils and responsibility for delivery of this initiative rests with individual councils.

Participants are randomly selected by this Department from those on the Live Register for 24 months or more and currently in receipt of a jobseekers payment. Those agreeing to be considered then have their contact details referred to the appropriate council for recruitment. Failure to respond to the Department's invitation or to offer an acceptable reason for being unable to participate in Gateway can result in sanctions for the jobseeker. A person cannot apply to participate on Gateway. All selection is undertaken by random processes conducted at local level by the Department of Social Protection. The selection is focused on those on the live register for two or more years and in receipt of a jobseekers' payment. I consider the current selection process effective and I have no proposals to alter these arrangements. The Deputy should note that a person interested in gaining access to a work placement or internship supported by the Department of Social Protection can avail of opportunities available on commu-

nity employment schemes and JobBridge. Details are available on the Department website on www.welfare.ie.

Homeless Persons Supports

23. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Social Protection if her attention has been drawn to the proposals put forward by Novas Initiatives concerning the impact of a reduced social welfare payment on homeless young persons; if she will accept these proposals; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43355/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Novas Initiatives, in a submission to the Department, have raised issues in relation to reduced rates of jobseeker's allowance for younger persons.

The reduced rates encourage young jobseekers to improve their skills and remain active in the labour market in order to avoid the risk of becoming long-term unemployed and will help them to progress into sustainable employment on a long-term basis. Where a person is in receipt of a reduced rate of jobseeker's allowance and he or she participates in a course of education, training a higher rate of €160 applies.

Similar issues to the ones raised by Novas Initiatives have been raised previously by Focus Ireland. Having regard to these issues approval has been given for a pilot community employment programme targeted at young persons in emergency accommodation. This pilot programme will be developed and run by Focus Ireland and is due to commence in 2013.

It is hoped that results from this pilot programme will inform wider policy development with regard to young persons in emergency homeless accommodation.

24. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Social Protection if her Department has completed the review of the domiciliary care allowance; the outcome of the review; the actions that will now be taken; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43341/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The review of the Domiciliary Care Allowance (DCA) scheme, which I initiated in May 2012, was completed in December 2012. The report of the review was published in April 2013.

The recommendations in the report of the review of the DCA scheme can be divided into administrative changes, which streamline, simplify and make the process more transparent for parents/guardians, and policy recommendations.

The findings of the report have been widely welcomed by parents/guardians and their representatives groups and the Department is actively working on implementing the administrative changes recommended in the report.

To date an implementation group has been established with representatives of parents groups, other departments/disability groups, to oversee the implementation of the administrative recommendations in the report. The group has met on a number of occasions and this work is progressing well.

An external service provider has been contracted to work on implementing the necessary IT system changes required to support the administrative changes recommended. It is planned to have the administrative recommendations completed and implemented in Q1 of 2014.

State Pensions Reform

25. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Social Protection from January 2014 work-

ers retiring will not be able to avail of their State pensions until they are 66 years of age, the way persons retiring next year at 65 years of age will engage with social welfare; if she has made provision for these retirees; if they will receive the transition payment to 67 years of age; if they have to sign on for jobseekers, if they will have to be available for work; if they will receive jobseeker's for nine months only and then be means-tested for the last three months; and if she has engaged with employers to make provision for workers to stay working for another year if they wish. [43134/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Increasing State pension age and the abolition of the State pension (transition) are steps that have been taken to ensure the sustainability of pensions into the future. The decision to reform State pension was taken in the context of changing demographics and the fact that people are living longer and healthier lives.

The Social Welfare and Pensions Act, 2011 provides that State pension age will be increased gradually to 68 years. This will begin in 2014 with the standardising of State pension age for all at 66 years and the cessation of State pension transition. The State pension age will then increase to 67 years in 2021 and to 68 years in 2028.

It should be noted that until the 1970s, the standard age for receipt of State pension was 70 years of age. This applied at a time when longevity was much lower and working patterns were more likely to be physically demanding. State pension (transition) was introduced in 1970 when it was known as the retirement pension and was designed to bridge the gap between the standard social welfare pension age, which at that time was 70 years of age, and retirement age. Overtime, the age for State pension contributory was reduced to 66 years.

However, the Deputy may wish to note that a significant number of people coming on to State pension (transition) in 2012 did not come from work as many were already on other social welfare schemes. In December 2012 there were approximately 14,400 State pension (transition) claims in payment and of those, 12.5 per cent came from work with over 50 per cent coming from other social welfare schemes such as illness benefit, jobseekers benefit and assistance, invalidity and carers, indicating that significant numbers of people are leaving the workforce for a variety of reasons well in advance of State pension age.

In terms of social welfare supports available to those at age 65, all short term social welfare schemes are payable to age 66. The main social welfare payment available to those who leave employment before pension age is jobseeker's benefit. Persons who qualify for a jobseeker's benefit who are aged between 65 and 66 years are generally entitled to receive payment up to the date on which they reach pensionable age (66 years). Each application for any social welfare scheme is assessed on its own merit in terms of qualifying criteria and contribution history. Where a person fails to meet the qualifying conditions of an insurance based scheme, a means tested assistance payment may be available provided they satisfy the qualifying conditions including a means test.

Further consideration is being given to the position of those exiting the workforce before pension age.

It should be noted there is no statutory compulsory retirement age for employees in Ireland. Responsibility for setting retirement age is a matter for the employer/employee relationship and the contract of employment. However, the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) has made rulings in a series of age-discrimination cases concerning Directive 2000/78/EC, which prohibit work-related discrimination on various grounds, including age. The CJEU has clarified that mandatory retirement ages may be set down by employers within the context of national law, whether by contract, custom and practice or other means, which must be objectively and reasonably justified by a legitimate social policy aim, with the means of achieving that aim

being both appropriate and necessary. Consideration of these issues as they relate to enterprise and equality policy come within the respective remit of the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation and the Minister for Justice and Equality.

An interdepartmental Working and Retirement Group was initiated to consider the cross departmental policy issues arising and thereby improve the sustainability and adequacy of pensions systems. The interdepartmental group, established in August 2012, is chaired by the Department of Social Protection, and includes representatives from the Department of Social Protection, the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, the Department of Justice and Equality, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the Pensions Board. Further engagement has also been undertaken with the Department of Education and Skills and the Department of Health and Children and work in this regard is on-going.

Poverty Impact Assessment

26. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Social Protection her views on whether all Government policy should be poverty proofed; if she has any proposals in this regard; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43344/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Poverty Impact Assessment (formerly poverty proofing) is a requirement under the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016. Poverty impact assessment is the process by which Government departments, local authorities and state agencies assess policies and programmes at design, implementation and review stages in relation to the likely impact that they will have or have had on poverty and on inequalities which are likely to lead to poverty, with a view to poverty reduction. In line with this requirement, the Cabinet Handbook states that memoranda for Government involving significant policy proposals should “indicate clearly the impact of the proposal on groups in poverty or at risk of falling into poverty”. Official guidelines for poverty impact assessment are available on the Department’s website (<https://www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/Guidelines-and-Templates.aspx>). The Social Inclusion Policy Division provides assistance to Government Departments and other bodies on the application of the guidelines. Ultimately, it is the responsibility of individual Government Departments and other bodies to adhere to the guidelines. The Government decided in 2012 to incorporate poverty impact assessment into an integrated social impact assessment in order to support the implementation of the national social target for poverty reduction and to ensure greater policy coordination in the social sphere. Social impact assessment is an evidence-based methodology to estimate the distributive impact of policy changes in relation to employment, income and services on vulnerable groups in society. It is widely practiced at EU level, in particular by the European Commission. At national level, social impact assessment is in its infancy.

In March 2013, the Department published the Social impact assessment of the main welfare and direct tax measures in Budget 2013. The assessment focuses on the main welfare and direct tax components of the Budget which have a direct impact on household incomes. A similar exercise is planned for Budget 2014..

Question No. 27 answered with Question No. 16.

Unemployment Data

28. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Social Protection the quality of information her Department has on the individual skill sets of each of the over 14,000 persons in

Kerry on the live register; if efforts are being made to bring these skills to the attention of industry leaders, if she would consider establishing a website with an anonymous serial-numbered account for everyone on the live register, with their CVs and other relevant professional details, which could be categorised by industry and made accessible to employers to enable them to search for suitable employees and offer them interviews; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43409/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Deputy will be aware that the Department of Social Protection has undergone a significant transformation in recent years with the merger of welfare and employment services, which up until 2012, were provided by three separate organisations. This on-going transformation agenda is underpinned by the Government's twin-pronged approaches set out in the Action Plan for Jobs, focused on creating additional jobs in the Irish economy and Pathways to Work, focused on trying to ensure that as many as possible of new or other vacancies in the economy are filled by candidates from the live register.

This merger facilitated the redesign and reconfiguration of services so as to improve the quality of service the Department provides to jobseekers and employers. In particular, it enables the Department to ensure that jobseekers registering for income supports have earlier access to employment services

The development of closer links with employers as a means of securing work opportunities to which jobseekers can be referred is another key aspect of the transformation agenda. To this end the Department established a new employer relations division in early 2012 and appointed nominated employer engagement managers in each of its thirteen divisions to increase its engagement with employers.

The employment services operated by the Department through its divisional and national support services and the European Employment Services (EURES) network deliver a range of services to assist employers in relation to their recruitment and employment support needs. This includes the provision of a dedicated vacancy and candidate matching service through the National Contact Centre, operating as Jobs Ireland. The Department also provides candidate matching services to employers in each of its offices around the country. The provision of this service utilises information relating to employment history and educational qualifications collected from jobseekers at their initial registration with our welfare/employment services and in their one-to-one engagement with case officers.

As part of the process of building closer links with employers the Department ran a series of employer road-shows in 2012/2013 and also hosted several employment and advice events across the country. A high proportion of attendees at the employment and advice events were unemployed people. Further similar events are planned for 2013/2014. Marketing collateral has been developed and a particular effort is being made to increase awareness of the existing recruitment subsidies available to employers. A jobseeker's information pack has also been developed. Employer and jobseekers information packs are available on www.welfare.ie

The Department's South West Division covers County Kerry. The Department's policy of engaging with employers is being actively implemented in Kerry. This includes case officers regularly calling to employers promoting employer services such as Jobs Ireland, JobsPlus, JobBridge and job matching supports and attending employers networking events in the Kerry area. Local management also have Local Employment Services and associated Partnerships in Kerry promoting these services and supports. A further avenue of services promotion is through locally organised Job Fairs, the most recent of which was held in Killarney in May 2013.

The Department's new Intreo service is a one stop shop for all income and employment

support services for our jobseeking customers. The Intreo service in Killarney commenced in January of this year and the service has also been partially introduced in Tralee and Listowel and it is intended to have it further rolled out in these towns and in Cahirciveen and Kenmare by the end of the year. Local Intreo services continuously promote local vacancies to unemployed clients and carry out matching to alert clients to suitable vacancies. Department staff also progress unemployed clients to education and training programmes to better enable them compete for job vacancies as they arise. The Department's work schemes such as Community Employment, TUS and Gateway are also providing key interventions and supports to enable long term unemployed prepare to progress into full time training and job placement.

In order to ensure a quality service for jobseekers and employers, the Department is in the process of developing its current Jobs Ireland web service. It is intended that the new system will provide enhanced online employment services for jobseekers and employers allowing employers to advertise their vacancies and search for jobseekers while all jobseekers will be able to search for vacancies, training and to create an online profile that will allow the jobseeker to demonstrate their relevant skillsets and experience to prospective employers. The option of making registration with this online service compulsory for all jobseekers who are in receipt of a welfare payment and are deemed 'job ready' by the Departments case officers is under consideration and is being catered for in the development of the new system.

Community Employment Schemes Eligibility

29. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Social Protection her plans to introduce measures to enable persons in receipt of carer's allowance to participate in community employment schemes or training courses provided by her Department in view of the limitations on carers in pursuing further education, training or employment. [43132/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): There are certain conditions placed on persons in receipt of carer's allowance. For example, they cannot be engaged in employment, self-employment, training or education courses outside the home for more than 15 hours a week as this would impact on their caring responsibilities. Community Employment involves working a 19½ hour week, so by taking up a CE position they would be in breach of this rule, which would cause the payment to cease.

However, when a person's caring responsibilities cease, they can transfer to a CE-qualifying social welfare payment (e.g. jobseeker's allowance) for at least 1 week and have their cumulative time spent in receipt of carer's allowance and their current payment counted towards the 12 month CE-qualifying period (e.g. 51 weeks on carer's allowance plus 1 week on jobseekers allowance will qualify the person for one year on CE).

There are no plans to introduce further measures in this regard in relation to participation on Community Employment schemes.

Social Welfare Schemes

31. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Social Protection in view of the recruitment embargo on local authorities, the paid employment opportunities that it is envisaged participants on the proposed gateway scheme will obtain once they have completed the programme. [43366/13]

50. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Social Protection the formal training qualifications that participants on Gateway will obtain during their participation. [43372/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I propose to answer Question Nos. 31 and 50 together.

Gateway aims to improve the employability and work readiness of participants by providing them with the opportunities to put their work skills into practice and to learn new skills to enable them to progress to work, further education or other development opportunities. In line with Pathways to Work, Gateway will provide, for those selected, opportunities to maintain work readiness and to bridge the gap between unemployment and re-entering the workforce. The process of identifying work opportunities is currently underway in each county and city council, including the necessary consultation with stakeholders. The Deputy will appreciate that the Department of Social Protection has no role in determining the positions that might be made available within each council given the range of services that county and city councils deliver.

I understand however, that a variety of tasks will be identified and made available to Gateway participants. This will include a mixture of new opportunities and opportunities to work in services that have not been provided by county and city councils due to the pressure of scarce resources.

The primary focus of Gateway is to improve the employability and work readiness of participants by providing them with opportunities to put their work skills into practice and to learn new skills to enable them to progress to work, further education or other development opportunities. County and city councils will have primary responsibility for identifying and arranging for the delivery of training requirements. The Government has provided funding of €2.835 million from the Dormant Accounts Fund to defray the costs of inputs and compliance/training costs.

Youth Guarantee

33. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Social Protection the total amount of funding allocated from the European Union for the Youth Guarantee scheme here; whether it is adequate in her view; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43347/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): As part of the European Council agreement on the 2014 – 2020 EU Budget earlier this year, it was decided, in association with the agreement on the Youth Guarantee, to provide €6 billion for a new Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) for regions with particularly high levels of youth unemployment. €3 billion of this is to be earmarked from existing resources within the European Social Fund, and €3 billion from a new fund. It was also decided that payments of the Youth Employment Initiative will be front-loaded and all monies provided for this purpose will be allocated to measures undertaken in 2014 and 2015.

The exact allocation of this funding between countries is yet to be determined. The Department of Social Protection is leading an inter-departmental group to develop an implementation plan for Ireland and we expect to submit this plan to the EU commission before the end of this year.

For Ireland this plan will likely require that we:

- Earmark a quota of additional places/opportunities for young people on existing schemes.
- Vary the eligibility conditions for access to certain schemes by young people - for example reduce the eligibility criteria so that young people can access places/opportunities after 4 – 6 months of unemployment rather than the general requirement of 12 months unemployment.
- Expand the range of opportunities currently on offer to young people in the form of further education and training, internships, subsidised private-sector recruitment, and supports for self-employment.

At present we spend c €170m per annum on employment, training and further education programmes for young people. The type of actions set out above will inevitably involve some increase in the level of expenditure on programme take-up by young people.

As an initial step towards preparing for implementation of the guarantee, provision was made in this week's 2014 Budget for:

- reducing the threshold (in terms of duration of unemployment) for JobsPlus eligibility from 12 months – to 6 months or less – in the case of persons aged less than 25 years,
- an additional intake of 1,500 young people on to the very successful JobBridge scheme,
- ensuring that 1,000 places on the Tús scheme are targeted at young people,
- developing a pilot programme to support young unemployed people to take up opportunities under schemes such as Your First EURES Job,
- ring-fencing a minimum of 2,000 training places for under-25s by the Department of Education and Skills, under a follow-up to the successful Momentum programme that operated in 2013, with income support for participants being provided by my department,
- the Department of Jobs Enterprise and Innovation making funds available to young entrepreneurs via Micro finance Ireland and other business start-up schemes.

In total, the provision across these headings in the 2014 Budget comes to about €46 million.

Given the scale of existing and future provision it is clear that the bulk of funding for labour market programmes for young people will continue to come from domestic exchequer sources. We will however endeavour to maximise Ireland's share of the additional funding available from the EU.

Labour Market Issues

34. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Social Protection the role of the new labour market council; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43373/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The role of the Labour Market Council is to advise the Minister on matters relating to the implementation of Pathways to Work.

Membership of the Council comprises national and international stakeholders and policy experts. This is an approach which has worked well, for example, with regard to the implementation of JobBridge.

Over an initial 12 month period to Sept. 2014, the group will be tasked with advising the Minister by:

- Monitoring the implementation of the Pathways to Work 2013 strategy.
- Identifying key issues arising from the implementation of the strategy and suggesting possible policy and/or operational responses.
- Providing input to and feedback on strategies to increase employer and jobseeker awareness of, and engagement with, the various initiatives identified in the strategy.

- Providing input to and feedback on the design and implementation of the Youth Guarantee for Ireland.
- Providing input to and feedback on the development of a contracting model for caseworker resources.
- Providing insights and experience relating to wider policy issues relevant to developments in the labour market generally, including employment trends, skills, training and workforce developments.
- Contributing to developing the wider public awareness of the Pathways to Work strategy.
- Providing the Minister for Social Protection and the Government with input to and feedback on revisions to and further development of the Pathways to Work strategy during 2014.
- Publishing an annual statement outlining the Council's findings.

National Internship Scheme Administration

35. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will explore the viability and potential benefits of increasing the top up payment paid to JobBridge interns; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43408/13]

43. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Social Protection if her attention has been drawn to the motion passed by ICTU which concludes that JobBridge depresses genuine job creation and exerts downward pressure on wage levels; and her response to these conclusions. [43368/13]

47. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Social Protection her views on whether companies who can afford to create a new position of employment are choosing instead to take nine months labour for free at her Department's expense via the JobBridge scheme; and if she will make reforms to the scheme to mitigate the negative impact it has on job creation. [43369/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I propose to take Question Nos. 35, 43 and 47 together.

The primary purpose of JobBridge is to provide unemployed people with an access route to employment which may otherwise be denied to them, on account of experience, qualifications or other grounds, in a very competitive labour market. JobBridge provides an opportunity to people, who have been unemployed for a period of time, to prove themselves to prospective employers and acquire real workplace experience to enhance their CVs.

As always with such schemes there will be some deadweight and displacement effects and the Department is acutely aware of the need to minimise these impacts. Accordingly, it incorporated a number of conditions into the scheme to minimise any such impacts including; placing a cap on the total number of interns that can be hired by any one organisation; placing limits on the duration of internships; including a cooling off period so that organisations cannot hire interns one after the other in sequence; requiring organisations to appoint a mentor to each intern, to complete a standard agreement for each intern and to provide an undertaking that the internship is not being used to displace employees. In addition host organisations are not permitted to advertise internships in areas where they have recently made redundancies or in areas where they currently have paid posts advertised. Host organisations must also complete and submit a monthly compliance report to the Department. The Department provides an on-line facility for interns or others to report breaches of these conditions.

The Department takes a serious view of any allegations that these scheme conditions/requirements are being breached and as part of its control process conducts random on-site inspection visits. The Department has conducted over 3,400 such monitoring visits to-date of which c 98% have been of a satisfactory nature. Remedial action is taken in all cases of non-compliance.

The Department also engaged a firm of expert economic consultants to conduct an independent evaluation of the operation and effectiveness of the scheme, including an assessment of its displacement impacts. Overall the evaluation, by Indecon, estimated the level of displacement (between 3% and 6%) to be negligible relative to the positive progression outcomes for interns (Over 61% of interns progress into employment).

I am not at this time planning to increase the top-up payment paid to interns.

Social Welfare Benefits Data

36. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of persons who have turned down reasonable offers of education, training or employment in each of the years since she began her tenure as Minister for Social Protection; the possible sanctions available on foot of such refusals; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43405/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): A jobseeker claim may be disallowed where the customer fails to meet the conditions of the scheme, including the requirement to be available for and genuinely seeking full-time work. A range of sanctions in the form of payment rate reductions can also be applied to clients who fail, without good cause, to cooperate with the Department's activation measures, including offers of education or training. Reduced payment rates (Penalty Rates) for jobseekers, which were introduced in April 2011 allow for a penalty of up to €44 per week to be applied to an individual's jobseeker payment where there is a failure to engage with activation measures. Strengthened sanctions were introduced in July 2013 to provide for a disqualification from payment for a period of up to 9 weeks, in circumstances where a customer who has had a Penalty Rate imposed for 21 days, continues to fail to engage.

Sanctions may also be applied if a client, without good cause, refuses or fails to take up a suitable education, training or development opportunity, or a specified employment programme, which is considered appropriate to the person's circumstances. In the period May to December 2011, 352 penalty rates were applied. From January to December, 2012, 1,455 penalty rates were applied bring the overall total to 1,807. To end September 2013, 2,403 penalty rates were applied bring the overall number applied to 4,210 since their introduction.

Anti-Poverty Strategy

37. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Social Protection her views on the sharp rise in severe material deprivation recorded here since 2007; the likely consequences of the changes to social transfers introduced by the latest budget for the prevalence and depth of poverty. [43362/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The national social target for poverty reduction is to reduce consistent poverty to 4 per cent by 2016 and to 2 per cent or less by 2020, from a 2010 baseline rate of 6.3 per cent. Reducing and ultimately eliminating poverty

remains a fundamental aspiration of Irish society and is a commitment of the Government. One component of consistent poverty is basic deprivation, which is the enforced lack of two or more items from a list of 11 basic goods and services due to a lack of income. The list includes items such as two pairs of strong shoes; a warm waterproof overcoat, keeping the home adequately warm and a meal with meat, chicken or fish (vegetarian equivalent) every second day. The indicator was developed by the Economic and Social Research Institute as a way of capturing the lack of resources in the population. It is a component of the consistent poverty indicator used for the national social target for poverty reduction.

The CSO Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) is the official data source for national poverty indicators and household and individual income. It found that in 2007 the rate of basic deprivation was 11.8 per cent. The rate doubled to reach 24.5 per cent in 2011. The increase in basic deprivation highlights the continuing impact of the economic crisis on household living standards, due to higher unemployment and a fall in incomes.

Social transfers play a key role in reducing poverty and basic deprivation. The effectiveness of social transfers in reducing poverty can be measured by comparing the at-risk-of poverty rate before and after social transfers. In 2007, social transfers (excluding pensions) reduced the at-risk-of-poverty rate from 33 per cent to 16.5 per cent, representing a poverty reduction effect of 50 per cent (rising to 60 per cent if pensions are included). This increased by 10 percentage points to a 60 per cent poverty reduction effect in 2011. Including pensions, the poverty reduction effect went from 60 per cent in 2007 to 68 per cent in 2011, an increase of 8 percentage points. The strong performance of social transfers over the period underlines the crucial importance of social welfare in protecting the most vulnerable people during the economic crisis. Using data from Eurostat from 2011, Ireland's performance in reducing poverty is far in excess of the EU-27 norm of 35.7 per cent, and even more so the 29 per cent reduction achieved in countries which are worst affected by the crisis.

The Department undertakes a social impact assessment of the main welfare and direct tax measures in the Budget. The main finding of the assessment of Budget 2013 was that it led to no significant change in the at-risk-of-poverty rate, including the at-risk-of-poverty rate for children, and that the strong poverty reduction performance of social transfers was maintained. I will publish the assessment of the 2014 Budget in due course.

State Pension (Contributory) Eligibility

38. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Social Protection following her signature of Statutory Instrument S.I. 616/11, the reason no pre-existing claimants were directly informed of the changes introduced to the rules of the scheme; the protocols in place in her Department to inform claimants of rule changes so that they may remain in compliance with the conditions of the scheme under which they are claiming and if these protocols were followed after her signature of S.I. 616/11; if she will seek legal advice on the soundness of relying on this statutory instrument in respect of pre-existing claimants when her Department made no effort to contact claimants directly to inform them of rule changes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43833/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): In all cases, it is a legal obligation, and the expectation of the Department, that applicants will supply all relevant information as part of their application process, and that they will subsequently report any changes in their circumstances, as such changes may affect their ongoing entitlements. In the context of State pension (transition/contributory) where an increase of qualified adult is in payment, this reporting obligation applies to both the primary recipient and their qualified adult should any

change in the latter's circumstances occur, such as the transfer of an asset. Similarly, it is a long established principle of the social welfare code that an individual does not deprive themselves of income or assets in order to qualify for a payment, or for a higher rate of payment than would otherwise have been granted. This principle has been in operation across the means tested social assistance schemes, including State pension (non-contributory) for many years. SI No. 616 of 2011 extends this provision to the means tested increase for qualified adult payable on State pension (transition/contributory).

There is a sound policy rationale and legal basis for extending the provisions of existing deprivation legislation to State pension (transition/contributory) new applicants and existing recipients. It is not the practice, nor would it be practical or cost effective, that the Department would undertake a direct individual information mailshot to all of customers who may be affected each time a legislative change is made which may affect them. The Department ensures that all information in relation to its schemes is available on the website *www.welfare.ie*. This includes reference to the underlying principle of deprivation of income or assets in the context of means testing for schemes operated by the Department. The website has recently been updated to ensure that the information in relation to contributory pensions reflects the legislative provisions.

Homeless Persons Data

39. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of applications made for an emergency needs payment which were prompted because a person or family had become homeless in 2010, 2011, 2012 and to date in 2013; the number of payments awarded in that time and the total cost; her views on whether current housing and rent assistance policy is directly fuelling this problem; the measure she proposes to tackle the issue; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43410/13]

55. **Deputy Joe Higgins** asked the Minister for Social Protection if her attention has been drawn to the increase in the number of homeless families following the reduction in rent allowance earlier this year. [43835/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 39 and 55 together.

Under the social welfare system, homeless people have entitlements to the full range of social welfare schemes, including supplementary welfare allowance (SWA) and associated supplements, subject to the normal qualifying conditions. The Department, through its work in the Homeless Persons Unit and the Asylum Seekers & New Communities Unit, also provides assistance to people in sourcing the most appropriate accommodation available. In addition, prison and hospital in-reach services are provided to explore accommodation options and, where necessary, liaising with local authorities to identify and source the most appropriate accommodation available for those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. This ensures that where possible, people are diverted away from homeless services and towards community-based supports.

The SWA scheme provides a once off payment to help with the cost of any exceptional needs a person may have which they could not reasonably be expected to meet from their own resources. Statistics are not available on the number of applications for exceptional needs payments (ENPs) prompted where a person or family has become homeless. Under the ENP scheme assistance may be provided towards rent deposits. This form of assistance is very important to those on low incomes who are at risk of, or who are homeless, or who rely on the

private rented market to meet their housing needs. The number of exceptional needs payments (ENPs) in respect of rent deposits for the years 2010 to September 2013 are provided in the attached tabular statement.

The purpose of the rent supplement scheme is to provide short-term support to eligible people living in private rented accommodation whose means are insufficient to meet their accommodation costs and who do not have accommodation available to them from any other source. There are approximately 82,000 rent supplement recipients for which the Government has provided over €403 million in 2013. The Department completed a review of the maximum rent limits for rent supplement earlier this year and the revised rent limits came into effect on 17 June 2013. The emphasis of the review was to ensure that value for money is achieved whilst at the same time ensuring that people on rent supplement are not priced out of the market for private rented accommodation. The review broadly reflects the new market trends with rises in rent limits in County Dublin and Galway with the majority of rural counties falling. Special provisions are made in exceptional circumstances including, for example, people with disabilities in specially adapted accommodation or homeless persons.

The Department's strategic policy direction is to return rent supplement to its original purpose of a short term income support. In July 2013 the Government approved the introduction of the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP). Under HAP, responsibility for recipients of rent supplement with a long-term housing need will transfer from the Department of Social Protection to local authorities. Officials in the Department of Social protection are working with those in the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government, who are leading the project, in developing proposals to give effect to this transfer. Under HAP, customers with assessments of a long term housing need who would otherwise receive rent supplement will be taken directly into HAP. There is no evidence to suggest that rent supplement policy is increasing the incidence of homelessness. Policy in relation to housing is a matter for the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government.

The number of ENP's in respect of rent deposits for the years 2010 to September 2013

Year	No of Claimants	Expenditure
2010	8,700	€4.5m
2011	7,500	€3.8m
2012	5,600	€2.6m
2013*	3,400	€1.6m

* as of 30 September 2013

Question No. 40 answered with Question No. 16.

Social Welfare Code

41. **Deputy Peter Mathews** asked the Minister for Social Protection her plans to ensure that persons are financially better off in employment rather than on welfare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43140/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The replacement rate for given income levels is a tool used to measure the degree to which out-of-work benefits when unemployed replace take home income from work. While there is no pre-determined level of replacement rate, which would influence every individual's decision to work, higher replacement rates may indicate lower incentives to take up employment. In this regard a replacement rate in

excess of 70% may be considered to be excessive. The Department will shortly make available an online “Better Off in Work” ready reckoner which will give an indicative estimate of the difference between a customer’s potential in-work and current out-of-work payments based on information input by the customer. I expect this to be of significant practical help to jobseekers. Replacement rate analysis, as supported by research by the ESRI, demonstrates that the great majority of people on the Live Register have a strong financial incentive to work and significant numbers leave the Register each year.

In this regard it may be noted that almost three-quarters of the people on the Live Register are only claiming a personal rate for themselves. They are either single or may have a spouse or partner who is working. In addition, 53% of the people on the Live Register receive less than the maximum personal weekly rate.

High replacement rates are generally associated with a relatively high number of dependent children and/or receipt of rent or mortgage supplement. However, it is important to note that only some 9% of persons on the Live Register are in receipt of rent supplement, with a further 1.5% in receipt of mortgage interest supplement. The vast majority of jobseekers do not receive these additional supports. Significant moves have already been taken to address the impact of housing entitlements upon replacement rates. Arising out of commitments in the Programme for Government to review the operation of the rent supplement scheme, proposals to integrate the systems for providing rent supplement and social housing support have been advanced. It is intended to transfer responsibility for the provision of rental assistance to persons with a long term housing need from the Department of Social Protection (currently provided through rent supplement) to housing authorities using a new housing assistance payment.

The effect of this transfer and the introduction of a new form of housing assistance payment will be to address one of the significant disincentives to accessing full-time employment that exists under the rent supplement scheme. This will have a positive impact on replacement rates.

Youth Unemployment Measures

42. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Social Protection the way she plans to respond to recent calls by the OECD for Ireland to do more to tackle youth unemployment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43360/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): In the first instance, the Government’s primary strategy to tackle all forms of unemployment, including youth unemployment, is to create the environment for a strong economic recovery by promoting competitiveness and productivity through the Action Plan for Jobs. Economic recovery will underpin jobs growth and thus reduce unemployment and long-term unemployment. Past experience suggests that youth unemployment, which tends to rise relatively rapidly in a downturn, can be expected to fall relatively rapidly during the recovery.

The Government is also implementing a number of programmes to assist young unemployed persons and keep young jobseekers close to the labour market. There are five main approaches being taken to tackle youth unemployment: education, training, job search assistance/guidance, work experience, and encouraging job creation. These actions range across a number of Departments and Agencies and include:

- The Youthreach programme providing 6,000 integrated education, training and work experience for early school leavers without any qualifications or vocational training who are between 15 and 20 years of age;

- The Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme scheme, which provides a range of courses to meet the education and training needs of unemployed people over 21 years of age, particularly focusing upon early school leavers;

- The Back to Education Allowance scheme run by the Department of Social Protection provides income maintenance for unemployed people returning to further or higher education. Over 6,500 young people participated on this scheme in the last academic year;

- Approximately 12,000 persons aged under 25 completed a training course with FÁS in 2012. This excludes apprenticeships and evening courses;

- This year MOMENTUM, a scheme for education and training interventions, which is part of the Government's Action Plan for Jobs initiative, is currently being rolled out by the Department of Education. MOMENTUM will support the provision of free education and training projects to allow 6,500 long term jobseekers to gain skills and to access work opportunities in identified growing sectors. Over 1,250 of these places are assigned specifically for under 25s;

- The JobBridge National Internship Scheme is focused on providing work experience to young people with the total number of placements of young people on JobBridge during 2012 at 2,700;

- Long-term unemployed youth will also benefit from the JobsPlus initiative which is designed to encourage employers to recruit long-term unemployed people. Under this scheme the State will pay circa €1 of every €4 it costs the employer to recruit a person from the Live Register;

The most recent statistics available from the CSO's Quarterly National Household Survey show the level of youth unemployment has fallen from an average of 75,000 in 2010 to 63,000 in the most recent twelve months for which data are available. The level of employment of young people appears to have stabilised, and indeed the employment rate (proportion of the population with jobs) for those aged 20-24 years rose from 46.5% in mid-2012 to 49% in the second quarter of this year. With regard to the expected future impact of existing policies, the original Action Plan for Jobs sets out a target for 100,000 net new jobs to be created by 2016, many of which will be filled by young people.

Looking forward, in addition to current initiatives, policies to increase youth employment will be supplemented by additional measures under the Youth Guarantee which will be rolled out in 2014. While the Recommendation for an EU-wide Youth Guarantee Scheme was adopted during the Irish Presidency earlier this year, the implementation of the scheme across the EU has yet to begin. It is recognised, both in the Youth Guarantee Recommendation itself and more generally, that the pace of implementation must take account of the scale of the youth unemployment and inactivity challenge and consider the fiscal capacity of each Member State. At the same time, Member States should take all possible measures to ensure that the Recommendation is swiftly implemented. The scale and nature of any additional measures required for the implementation of a Guarantee at national level will depend on the trend in youth unemployment, and in particular the number of young people likely to experience periods of unemployment of more than four months under current policies.

The Department of Social Protection has set up an interdepartmental group with officials and programme managers from the Department of Education and Skills, Department of Jobs Enterprise and Innovation, and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, to review the current range of youth employment policies in Ireland to assess what measures will need to be taken to commence the implementation of the Guarantee. The Department of Social Protection has also engaged the assistance of the OECD in developing the Youth Guarantee Policy.

It is intended to produce a concrete plan for the implementation of the Guarantee for consideration by the Government in December before being transmitted to the European Commission by the end of 2013. Development of the implementation plan will include identification of the costs of implementation, and how it is envisaged that these will be met (how much can be provided from domestic sources, and what is the likely requirement from EU funds, e.g. European Structural Fund and Youth Employment Initiative). The amount that will be required for Ireland will only become clear when the implementation plans are drawn up.

Question No. 43 answered with Question No. 35.

Civil Registration Legislation

44. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for Social Protection her plans to amend the Civil Registration Act 2004; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43139/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): On the 19 July, 2013, the Cabinet approved the drafting of the Civil Registration (Amendment) Bill 2013. I brought this proposal for legislation to the Cabinet as there are a number of important policy issues that I want to see implemented through amendments to the 2004 Act. Two of the principal ones are as follows:

- the introduction of measures to combat marriages of convenience by making such marriages far more difficult to contract in the future;
- the establishment of a birth registration process which will make it an obligation to include the father's particulars on a birth certificate so as to ensure that the child will have a record of their father.

The Bill will also provide for a wide range of issues relating to the registration of life events in the State. Representations and recommendations have been made by various groups and organisations since the enactment of the Civil Registration Act 2004 and this Bill seeks to address these issues. The General Register Office, which administers the Civil Registration Service, has identified areas where legislative amendments are required to streamline the service to the general public. The Department is currently working with the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel to the Government on the drafting of the heads of a Bill and I hope to introduce legislation early next year.

It should also be noted that the Civil Registration Act 2004 will be further amended through gender recognition legislation which I intend to introduce early next year. I published the General Scheme of the Gender Recognition Bill 2013 on the 17 July, 2013, following Cabinet approval. The Bill provides for the recognition of the acquired gender of transgender people aged 18 and over and who are not married or in a civil partnership. The 2004 Act will be amended to provide for a gender recognition register.

Social Welfare Schemes

45. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Social Protection her views on whether the activation programmes in her Department will have a depressing effect on wages. [43370/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The major activation programmes operated in the Department are aimed at increasing the capacity of unemployed people through education and training (for example through the Back to Education Allowance), through offer-

ing them periods of productive employment on work of value to the community (for example through Community Employment and Tús) or through offering them periods of work experience (for example under JobBridge). These programmes are therefore likely, through helping to increase the capacity and productivity of the workforce, to support more general increases in output, productivity and wages in the economy over time. While activation efforts can, by increasing the supply of labour, act to restrain upward pressure on wage levels during times of full, or close to full, employment it is very unlikely that activation efforts would ever lead to a reduction in wages. It is particularly unlikely that activation efforts would act in any way to depress salary levels during a period of high unemployment.

Child Benefit Payments

46. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Social Protection her plans to address the persistent control savings associated with child benefit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43136/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Child Benefit is a payment to parents for the support of their children. It is paid to approximately 606,000 families in respect of some 1.15 million children with an estimated expenditure of approximately €1.9 billion. I am very conscious of requirement to safeguard the Child Benefit budget and, in this regard, my Department has taken a proactive approach to ensuring that it is only paid to eligible families. The policy of issuing continuing eligibility certificates to parents commenced in 2008 and the control policy for the Scheme was reviewed in 2010 to ensure that controls on fraud and abuse of the scheme continue to be effective and relevant. As a result of this review, enhanced and updated control measures have been devised. Control savings are an estimate of the value of the various control activities across the schemes in payment. They refer to future expenditure that would have been incurred but for this control work. Without this control work, the social welfare expenditure would over time increase by this amount. Control savings are used as a performance indicator for year-on-year activities. They do not include any cases of departmental or clerical error or any cases where the customer voluntarily told the Department of changes to their means or circumstances, which resulted in a change to their rate of payment.

The total savings from Child Benefit control activity was €48.5 million in 2008, €89 million in 2009, €106 million in 2010, €85 million in 2011 and €83 million in 2012. The level of savings achieved is due to the effectiveness of the control programme in recent years.

Question No. 47 answered with Question No. 35.

JobsPlus Scheme

48. **Deputy John Halligan** asked the Minister for Social Protection her views on whether the higher subsidies for employers who employ a person who is two years unemployed under the JobsPlus scheme as against a lower payment for persons unemployed for a shorter time will inevitably encourage employers to ignore applications from those out of work for a shorter period; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43414/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): JobsPlus is a new simplified scheme which replaced the Employer Job (PRSI) Exemption (effective from 20th June 2010) and Revenue Job Assist (which commenced on 6 April 1998) schemes and is more targeted at channelling full time job opportunities to the longer term unemployed. JobsPlus provides an immediate financial incentive to employers who recruit employees from those who are long

term unemployed on the live register. The incentive is payable, on a monthly basis, over a two year period while the employee is retained in full time employment. JobsPlus is biased in favour of those who are more long term unemployed by setting the value of the incentive at two levels:

- In respect of recruits unemployed for more than 12 months but less than 24 months: €7,500.
- In respect of recruits unemployed for more than 24 months: €10,000.

While unemployment has stabilised recently, persons on the live register for a year or more now account for about 45.5% of all persons on the live register and this rate has been increasing slowly in recent months. Every new full time job supported under JobsPlus not only reduces social welfare payments made by the State, but critically reduces the payments made to the longer term unemployed people, whom evidence suggests are more likely to become dependents of welfare. In addition, these new full time workers will now contribute to the Exchequer in terms of tax and PRSI paid.

State Pension (Contributory) Eligibility

49. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she has conducted research assessing the impact of changes to the State pension for future pensioner poverty. [43682/13]

51. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will respond to the finding of the KPMG actuarial review of the Social Insurance Fund that as a consequence of changes to eligibility rules for the State pension contributory more persons retiring in 2020 will be entitled to a smaller pension and if she is concerned in view of the role played by social transfer in reducing pensioner poverty that this risks increasing pensioner poverty. [43681/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 49 and 51 together.

As the pension system in Ireland has developed, pensions policy has continued to evolve. In recent years there has been a particular focus on the sustainability of the State pension system because of the demographic issues that Ireland faces; the associated increases in pension and other age related costs; and the deterioration in the public finances since the recession.

Significant research has taken place with regard to pensions generally and the impact of changes in State pension. This has included a Green Paper on Pensions, various technical studies and, most recently, the OECD Review of Pensions in Ireland.

The Actuarial Review of the Social Insurance Fund provided evidence that the task of financing increased pension spending will fall to a diminishing share of the population as demographic projections indicate that the ratio of working age to pensioners will decrease from 5.3 at present to 2.3 by 2050 while the number of older people will increase from 12% of the population being over 65 in 2012 to an estimated 23% in 2050. In the medium to long term, pension related expenditure will account for an increasing proportion of Fund expenditure - rising from 57% in 2011 to 85% in 2066.

In terms of impact assessment, the Actuarial Review has assessed the future impact of State pension changes. This shows that, notwithstanding the State pension reform measures, social insurance benefits offer excellent value for money for those on the lower part of the income distribution, those with shorter contribution histories, and the self-employed. The social solidarity

principle which underlies the Fund is reflected in the fact that, for those at the higher end of the income distribution, the Fund is redistributive and this group generally get back less than they pay in.

Payment of pension is now more closely linked to contributions made over a working life due to the comprehensiveness of the social insurance system, the existence of voluntary contributions, the Homemaker's Scheme and the facility for awarding credited contributions to employees in times of unemployment or illness. All of these elements mean that, unless a person goes abroad or operates in the informal economy, s/he will have the potential to achieve a 100% insurance record.

The Deputy may wish to note that there have been significant improvements with regard to the level of pensioner poverty in Ireland in recent years. This is mainly attributed to substantial increases in the rates of State pensions over the period and other non-cash benefits. In 2004, the at risk of poverty rate for people aged 65 or over was 27.1% - higher than for other age groups and higher than the rate for the total population which was 19.4%. By 2011 the at risk of poverty rate for those aged 65 or over had dropped to 9.7% while that for the population as a whole is at 16%. In 2011, the consistent poverty rate for those over age 65 was 1.9% compared to 6.9% for the population as a whole. This compares to 3.9% in 2004 which stood at 6.6% for the population. Every effort has been made to maintain the rate of State pension at 34% of average earnings.

Even with the State pension reforms underway the role of social transfers will continue to be protected and social welfare supports will continue to be available to those most in need. It should also be borne in mind that for those with a shorter contribution history which will result in a lower rate of payment of State pension, the non-contributory pension will continue to be available to those who meet the qualifying criteria which could result in a higher rate of payment.

Question No. 50 answered with Question No. 31.

Question No. 51 answered with Question No. 49.

Voluntary Work Option Issues

52. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will consider introducing clearer guidelines for the accessibility of the voluntary work option to ensure that jobseekers can make a valuable contribution to society while still being eligible for a jobseeker's payment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43407/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I am deeply conscious of the long tradition of volunteering in this country and the contribution that it makes to Ireland's social fabric. In recognition of the vital role played by the voluntary community, the Department operates a Voluntary Work Option scheme for customers on the jobseeker schemes. Under these arrangements jobseekers may engage in voluntary work within the State without affecting their entitlements provided they continue to satisfy the statutory conditions of being available for and genuinely seeking work. The aims of the Voluntary Work Option are twofold, namely: (i) To encourage voluntary organisations to involve jobseekers to the greatest extent possible in their activities by creating new opportunities for voluntary work; and (ii) To inform jobseekers of their freedom to involve themselves in voluntary work and to encourage them to do so.

Examples of voluntary work in which jobseekers may engage include helping the sick, elderly or persons with a disability or assisting youth clubs, church groups, sports groups, cultural

organisations and local resident associations. Voluntary groups may be locally or nationally organised and may include community groups.

Details of the Voluntary Work Option arrangements are published on the Department's website and, in order to ensure that the profile is raised, all staff involved in the administration of the jobseeker schemes were recently reminded of these arrangements and of the operational procedures under which they operate.

Skills Development

53. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Social Protection the steps she will take to provide assistance to jobseekers to meet transport and subsistence costs associated with participation in skillsnet training; and if she has discussed this with the Department of Education and Skills. [43375/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Skillnets is a state-funded, enterprise-led support body dedicated to the promotion and facilitation of training and up-skilling as key elements in sustaining Ireland's national competitiveness. They support and fund networks of enterprises engaged in training under a Training Networks Programme. If persons wishes to pursue a part time education course they may be able to do so while retaining their jobseekers payment under the Part Time Education Option (PTEO) of the back to education programme. The Department supports the provision of a wide variety of Skillnets training, delivered by networks of private sector companies in a range of sectors and regions, mainly via the PTEO. The PTEO allows participants to attend part-time day/evening or weekend courses of education or training and retain their jobseekers payment while an entitlement exists provided that they continue to satisfy the conditions of being available for and genuinely seeking employment on an on-going basis. Payment is made at the same rate as the primary payment and no maximisation of payments occurs.

While generally out of pocket expenses are not paid in respect of such courses, in circumstances where a person receiving a relevant social welfare payment agrees to attend a specified short-term course of education, training or development that is specifically initiated and organised by a Department's case officer s/he will be paid Out of Pocket Expenses.

There are no plans to change these conditions. The Department is in on-going contact with the Department of Education and Skills with regard to issues of support to social welfare recipients engaged in education and training.

Information and Communications Technology Issues

54. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for Social Protection the progress made in providing a new computer software programmes for the delivery and administration of direct payment social welfare schemes; if all schemes will be administered via a single platform; if she would outline the co-operation and information exchange that takes place between her Department's IT system and that of Revenue. [43404/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): My Department has, over a considerable number of years, made extensive use of a number of computer systems to administer social welfare schemes and to provide payments to its clients. For the past number of years, it has been engaged in a multi-year Service Delivery Modernisation Programme designed to deliver a high quality, proactive service to our clients. As part of that process a new computing

platform, known as the Business Object Model implementation (BOMi), is continuously being developed and implemented. Approximately 80% of all claims administered by the Department are currently managed on the BOMi. In response to the introduction of Local Property Tax earlier this year, the Department developed new facilities on the BOMi to process all payments, including those for claims administered on other systems. It was then in a position to apply deductions to certain of those schemes in accordance with social policy and legal constraints. It is intended, over time and as resources permit, that all schemes will be administered and paid from the BOMi platform. The system is facilitating the transformation programme which is currently underway within the Department and it also enables information to be shared and services to be provided to other Departments and agencies.

The Department and the Revenue Commissioners co-operate very closely on matters of common interest and information has been exchanged electronically on a regular basis regarding clients, earnings data, employment status, DSP claims and payments and control information. This information is exchanged at varying intervals (e.g. weekly, monthly, yearly) depending on the business processes involved. Bi-lateral groups exist at various levels which meet regularly to review co-operation between both organisations and implement improvements, including new exchanges of data between the two organisations, as requirements are identified.

Question No. 55 answered with Question No. 39.

Education and Training Provision

56. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the supports provided by her Department to social welfare recipients who have a qualification in a discipline where there are limited opportunities for employment and who wish to seek third level education in another discipline so that their prospects of employment would be improved; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43133/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I understand that the Deputy is referring to supports to a person on a social welfare payment from the Department attending a full-time third level course of study. The back to education allowance (BTEA) is a second chance education opportunities scheme designed to remove the barriers to participation in second and third level education by enabling those eligible to certain social welfare payments to continue to receive a payment while pursuing an approved full-time education course that leads to a higher qualification than that already held. A person wishing to pursue BTEA will have to satisfy a number of conditions such as being of a certain age, in receipt of a prescribed social welfare payment for a specified time period, pursuing a full time course of study leading to a recognised qualification in a recognised college and progressing in the level of education held by the client with reference to the national framework of qualifications (NFQ) among others. BTEA guidelines are in the main in line with the mechanisms in place for student support type schemes administered by the Department of Education and Skills. State support for education purposes is grounded on a student progressing from one qualification level to a higher one. The progression criteria are essential and apply to all courses of study. The BTEA scheme was never intended to be an alternative form of funding for people entering or re-entering the third level education system.

A person who wishes to engage in part time day, evening or weekend courses or more intensive short duration courses of education and training while retaining their jobseekers payments may be eligible under that the part time education option (PTEO). People must continue to satisfy the conditions of being available for and genuinely seeking employment on an on-going basis.

Recent education and training interventions supported by the Department in 2013 include Springboard, MOMENTUM and ICT Skills programme. Springboard was launched in June 2013 with 6,000 free places on part-time conversion courses of less than one year duration that have a labour market focus. MOMENTUM supports the provision of free education and training projects to allow 6,500 jobseekers (who are unemployed for 12 months or more) to gain skills and to access work opportunities in identified growing sectors. The ICT Skills programme provides 769 free fees places for level 8 conversion programmes in 2013. In addition, the Department also supports the provision of wide variety of training through networks of private sector companies, in a range of sectors and regions, supported by Skillnets Ltd via the PTEO.

Social Welfare Benefits Waiting Times

57. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will account for the high turnover rate of medical assessors in her Department; if her attention has been drawn to the fact that there are significant problems in processing fresh claims and appeals due to insufficient resources being allocated towards the area; if her attention has been drawn to the ongoing problems with the standard forms which general practitioners and consultants must complete in respect of certain claims and the unnecessary delays that are being created as a result; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43388/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Department is committed to ensuring that claims and appeals are processed as expeditiously as possible. There are currently 20 Medical Assessors, including the Chief Medical Adviser and the Deputy Chief Medical Adviser, employed by the Department. Due to the retirement of several Medical Assessors in recent years a number of vacancies have arisen. In response, the Department in conjunction with the Public Appointment Service (PAS) ran a competition in 2012 to recruit replacement/additional Medical Assessors. Four Medical Assessors appointed from that competition are currently employed with a further Medical Assessor due to commence work this month. The Department has continued to liaise with the PAS with a view to filling these critical vacancies. A further competition was advertised on 13 September 2013 inviting suitably qualified candidates to apply for the position of Medical Assessor in the Department and interviews are due to take place shortly. This competition is one of a number of options that the Department is currently exploring in order to increase its capacity to carry out medical assessments and reviews of its illness/disability/caring schemes thus enabling the Department to deliver a quality service to our customers. The Department's disability and illness related schemes require a high level of medical evidence which must be assessed by the Medical Assessors and this, together with other qualifying criteria such as means testing for Disability Allowance and Carer's Allowance and PRSI contributions for Invalidity Pension, can affect the processing times of claims. There has also been an increase in volume of customer claims to particular schemes. Despite this, there have been significant improvements from 2012 in the waiting times for assessment by the Medical Assessors across all the illness related schemes. Furthermore, the processing backlogs have been eliminated across all the illness related schemes except for Disability allowance which is currently being cleared. Claims, appeals and any urgent cases (medical/social reasons) are dealt with on a priority basis. It is the policy of the Department to standardise and simplify its application forms as much as possible. However, the design and layout of application forms must also have regard to the particular requirements of individual schemes. Application forms are reviewed on a regular basis including those parts of forms that relate to the provision of medical evidence. The design of the medical elements of application forms is undertaken in consultation with the Department's Chief Medical Adviser and Deputy Chief Medical Adviser.

JobsPlus Scheme

58. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she considered requiring employers availing of JobsPlus to pay wages at a level higher than the minimum wage. [43371/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): JobsPlus is a new simplified scheme which replaced the Employer Job (PRSI) Exemption (effective from 20 June 2010) and Revenue Job Assist (which commenced on 6 April 1998) schemes and is more targeted at channelling full time job opportunities to the longer term unemployed. JobsPlus provides an immediate financial incentive to employers who recruit employees from those who are long term unemployed on the live register. The incentive is payable, on a monthly basis, over a two year period while the employee is retained in full time employment. One of the qualifying conditions of the Incentive requires the employer to be compliant with Irish employment laws. Under the National Minimum wage Act 2000, employees are entitled to a minimum wage. All employers recruiting under this incentive are required to comply with the conditions as set out in the Act.

There are no plans at present to change the qualifying conditions of the incentive.

Question No. 59 answered with Question No. 15.

State Pensions Reform

60. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Social Protection if her attention has been drawn to Social Justice Ireland's proposal for a universal pension whereby every person over the age of 65 years would have a pension of €230.30 per week; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43406/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Report from Social Justice Ireland titled "A Universal Pension for Ireland" recommends a move to a universal based pension system based on residency which would replace the State pension contributory and non-contributory, widow's, widower's or surviving civil partner's (contributory) pension, qualified adult allowance and which would be financed by reducing private pension tax reliefs. The sustainability of the pension system is a particular concern because of the demographic challenges Ireland faces, the associated increases in pension (and other age related) costs, and the deterioration in the public finances. This means that, in the future, the task of financing increased pension spending will fall to a diminishing share of the working population as demographic projections indicate the ratio of working age to older people will decrease from 5.3 to 1 at present to 2.1 to 1 by 2060. Life expectancy in Ireland is also increasing and whilst this is very welcome development, it also presents very real and obvious public policy challenges. A number of policy reviews on pensions have been published in recent years. The Green Paper on Pensions was published in 2007, followed by a country-wide consultation on the future of pensions. The National Pensions Framework (2010) proposed a framework for the future development of pensions. In 2011 and 2012, a number of pension reforms were introduced, State pension age has been increased and changes to eligibility have been introduced which link employment more closely to the rate of pension paid.

In April 2013, the OECD in their Review of the Irish Pension System undertook an independent and objective review of pension policy and endorsed the approach of policy to date. However, it also concludes that financial sustainability issues and our changing demographics and aging population mean that further reform is required.

The report recommends for consideration a range of changes in the key parameters of the Irish State, occupational and private pension schemes and outlines options for more profound structural reforms of the retirement income system. The OECD Report recommended expanding private pension coverage by the introduction in the future of a compulsory or soft compulsory private pension. In the context of the introduction of such an option, it also proposed structural reform of the State pension, including the option of a universal based payment, based on the principle of residency. However, residency based criteria can pose particular difficulties since Ireland does not maintain details of long term residency status. Detailed analysis of these options is on-going in my Department and consideration of the recommendations of this review will inform further developments in the area of pension policy.

The State pension has been successful in lifting older people out of poverty. Compared to the rest of the population, older people in Ireland have the lowest poverty rates (at 1.9%) and are least likely to be at risk of poverty (pointing to the adequacy of the State pension).

Secure and adequate finances are one of the fundamental components of a happy and active retirement. The overall objective of the pension system in Ireland is to provide an adequate and sustainable basic standard of living through direct supports in the form of the State pension and to encourage people (through tax reliefs) to make supplementary pension provision so that they may have an adequate income replacement rates when they retire from work.

Housing Assistance Payments Administration

61. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the extent to which in the coming year, she expects to be in a position to transfer responsibility for meeting the housing needs of those on local authority housing lists and having to rely on rent support from her Department to the Department of the Environment thereby achieving considerable savings; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43307/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Under HAP, responsibility for recipients of rent supplement with a long-term housing need will transfer from the Department of Social Protection to housing authorities. Officials in the Department of Social Protection are working with those in the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government (DECLG), who are leading the project, to assist with the necessary legal, policy and operational matters required to progress HAP. This summer, DECLG undertook a 'Business Processing Design' exercise to determine the business processes required to support the implementation of HAP roll out. This exercise will assist DECLG in the drafting of the necessary legislation and feed into the development of implementation plans and the necessary IT infrastructure to support the roll-out of the new scheme in the selected test authorities.

The Department is advised that following the enactment of the relevant legislation, a HAP testing phase will be carried out in the selected local authorities in 2014 with full roll out of the scheme to follow once the test phase is complete.

Government has approved that funding will be provided to local authorities to cover the costs of HAP by way of a funding transfer from the rent supplement scheme to DECLG in so far as the expenditure relates to persons transferring from rent supplement.

Rent Supplement Scheme Administration

62. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will review

eligibility for rent supplement to include issues such as the need not to participate in anti-social behaviour; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43137/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The purpose of the rent supplement scheme is to provide short-term support to eligible people living in private rented accommodation whose means are insufficient to meet their accommodation costs and who do not have accommodation available to them from any other source. There are approximately 82,000 rent supplement recipients for which the Government has provided over €403 million for 2013. In the case of private rented accommodation, tenancy arrangements involve a contract between the landlord and tenant and tenant behaviour is a matter for the landlord in the first instance. There are a number of avenues open to landlords in such cases, including the mediation service for landlords and tenants operated by the Private Residential Tenancies Board and/or recourse to the Garda Síochána and/or the Courts in relation to the enforcement of the law in dealing with anti-social or criminal behaviour. If necessary, the landlord may seek termination of the tenancy which, if affected, would result in the termination of rent supplement. The programme for Government contains a commitment to review the operation of rent supplement to ensure that tenants who are receiving long term support from the State under the scheme are subject to the same type of anti-social behaviour regime as local authority tenants. The most appropriate way for this to happen is for local authorities to take over responsibility for meeting the accommodation needs of these individuals. Officials in the Department are working closely with those in the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government in transferring responsibility for the provision of rental assistance to persons with a long term housing need from this Department to local authorities using a new Housing Assistance Payment (HAP). It is intended that testing of HAP will be carried out in selected local authorities during 2014 subject to the enactment of the relevant legislation.

Social welfare legislation already provides the Department with the authority to refuse, suspend or terminate payment of a rent supplement in the case of a person who has been required to deliver up possession of a dwelling provided by a housing authority or an approved body where the reasons for that requirement include anti-social behaviour or the interests of good estate management. I have no plans to make any further amendments to the eligibility for rent supplement in this regard.

Question No. 63 answered with Question No. 15.

State Gifts

64. **Deputy Patrick Nulty** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the total number of State gifts presented to foreign dignitaries during each of the past ten years; the total value of such gifts; if he will provide an itemised list of the gifts by country of the dignitary being presented with the gift; the nature of the gift and manufacturer and the value of the gift. [43992/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): It is standard international practice in the context of Ministerial and other High-Level visits to exchange small, representative tokens of mutual appreciation. A decision is made on the type and value of the item to be presented following consultation to ensure it respects the culture of the recipient and any ethics requirements. These items are sourced in Ireland or are of Irish interest. A list of items presented by successive Ministers for Foreign Affairs to foreign dignitaries during each of the past ten years is listed as follows:

OSCE Ministerial Gifts – December 2012

Newbridge Carriage Clocks were purchased for each Head of Delegation as a gift from the Tánaiste in his role as Chairperson in Office of the OSCE. They were purchased at a reduced price of €45.38. The total cost came to €3,902.68

The gift was presented to the Heads of Delegations who attended the OSCE Ministerial in December 2012. The delegations included the 57 participating States, 11 partner States, OSCE Secretary General, Heads of OSCE Institutions and Heads of International Organisations present.

The list is as follows:

Participating States (57)

Country	-	-
Albania	Andorra	Armenia
Austria	Azerbaijan	Belarus
Belgium	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Bulgaria
Canada	Croatia	Cyprus
Czech Republic	Denmark	Estonia
Finland	France	Georgia
Germany	Greece	Holy See
Hungary	Iceland	Ireland
Italy	Kazakhstan	Kyrgyzstan
Latvia	Liechtenstein	Lithuania
Luxembourg	Malta	Moldova
Monaco	Montenegro	Mongolia
Norway	Poland	Netherlands
Romania	Russian Federation	Portugal
Serbia	Slovakia	San Marino
Spain	Sweden	Slovenia
Tajikistan	The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	Switzerland
Turkmenistan	Ukraine	Turkey
United States	Uzbekistan	United Kingdom

Partner States (11)

Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Australia, Morocco, Tunisia, Japan, South Korea, Thailand, Afghanistan

International Organisations (14)

European Union, Council of Europe, UNHCR, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, UNRCCA, The United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia, NATO, Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia(CICA), CSTO, Collective Security Treaty Organisation, CTBTO, The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organisation, EBRD, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, International Committee of the Red Cross, Organisation for Democracy and Economic Development (GUAM), Organisation for Islamic Cooperation (OIC), League of Arab States, CICA, The Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia.

OSCE senior officials (4)

Table 2

Gifts presented by successive Ministers for Foreign Affairs to foreign dignitaries,
2003 - 2013

Year	Country	Item	Value
2003	.	.	.
Minister for Foreign Affairs	.	.	.
.	Bahrain	Louise Kennedy 12” Spindle Tree Vase	€145.00
	(Incoming)		
.	Bulgaria	Galway Crystal Desk Set	€64.00
	(Incoming)		
.	Latvia	Nora Watson Celtic Design Brooch	€49.00
	(Incoming)		
.	Lithuania	Tipperary Crystal Rotation Bowl	€140.00
	(Incoming)		
.	Egypt	Ceramic Bowl	€140.00
.	.	Tipperary Crystal Candlesticks	€65.00
.	.	Galway Crystal Desk Set	€64.00
.	Palestine	Ceramic Bowl	€140.00
.	.	Tipperary Crystal Candlesticks	€65.00
.	.	Galway Crystal Letter Opener	€25.00
.	.	Galway Crystal Desk Set	€64.00
.	Jordan	Declan Killen Silver Cufflinks	€55.00
.	.	Declan Killen Silver Cufflinks	€55.00
.	.	Galway Crystal Desk Set	€64.00
.	Syria	Ceramic Bowl	€140.00
.	.	Galway Crystal Desk Set	€64.00
.	Lebanon	Tipperary Louise Kennedy Crystal Sea Aster Bowl	€144.00
.	.	Galway Crystal Desk Set	€64.00

Questions - Written Answers

Year	Country	Item	Value
.	Jordan	Patrick Francis Tie	€18.81
.	Syria	Patrick Francis Tie	€18.81
.	Lebanon	Patrick Francis Tie	€18.81
.			
	Mozambique	Louise Kennedy Tri Star Vase	€120.00
.	.	Galway Crystal Clock and Letter Opener	€60.00
.	.	Galway Crystal Bowl (Small)	€45.00
.	.	Declan Killen Silver Cufflinks	€50.00
.	.	Galway Crystal Clock	€35.00
.	.	Declan Killen Silver Cufflinks	€50.00
.	South Africa	Declan Killen Silver Cufflinks	€50.00
.	.	Holden Leather Document Holder and Crystal Letter Opener	€117.00
.	Serbia & Montenegro	Waterford Crystal - Rock of Cashel Vase	€140.00
.	.	Galway Crystal Burren Vase	€75.00
.	.	Galway Crystal Burren Vase	€75.00
.	.	Galway Crystal Desk Set	€64.00
.	Bosnia & Herzegovina	Waterford Crystal - Rock of Cashel Vase	€140.00
.	.	Tipperary Crystal - Brannagh Bowl	€133.10
.	.	Waterford Crystal - Apprentice Bowl	€139.00
.	.	Galway Crystal Leah Waisted Vase	€64.00
.	.	Galway Crystal Desk Set	€64.00
.	Kosovo	Tipperary Crystal Square Platter	€133.10
.	.	Galway Crystal Clifden Flared Vase	€68.00
.	.	Michelle Hannon Ceramic Bowl	€35.00

Year	Country	Item	Value
.	Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	Tipperary Crystal - Rings Footed Bowl	€135.00
.	.		
.		Galway Crystal Clifden Flared Vase	€68.00
.	.	Galway Crystal Desk Set	€64.00
.	.		
.		Michelle Hannon Ceramic Bowl	€35.00
.	USA – San Francisco	Galway Crystal 11” Burren Bowl	€90.00
.	.	Tipperary Crystal 26cm Rotation Vase	€89.00
.	.	Tipperary Crystal 5 sided Bowl	€85.00
.	.	Tipperary Crystal Empire Vase	€85.00
.	Estonia	Samuel Beckett on Film (DVD Box Set)	€105.90
.	Singapore	Waterford Crystal Vase	€140.00
.	.	Galway Crystal 9” Burren Vase	€71.08
.	.	Galway Crystal 10” Clifden Waisted Vase	€62.26
.	Malaysia	Peter Sweetman Wooden Vase (Ash)	€150.00
.	.	Mullingar Pewter Candlesticks (3 Branch)	€114.28
.	EU	Yeats Collected - Book	€120.00
	(Incoming)		
.	Romania	Galway Crystal Desk Set	€64.00
	(Incoming)		
.	Slovakia	Watercolours of Ireland - Book	€51.42
	(Incoming)		
.	Uganda	Book - Yeats Collected Bound	
	(Incoming)		€120.00
.	USA	Watercolours of Ireland (Book)	€51.42
	(Incoming)		

Questions - Written Answers

Year	Country	Item	Value
.	.	Total	€4,961.99
2004	.	.	.
Minister for Foreign Affairs	.	.	.
.	Hong Kong	Hibernia Mint James Joyce Stamp	€55.30
.	(Incoming)		
.	Croatia	Galway Crystal 10" Vase	€49.00
.	(Incoming)		
.	Cyprus	Encyclopaedia of Ireland	€58.00
.	(Incoming)		
.	India	Galway Crystal Burren 9" Vase	€75.00
.	.	Galway Crystal Clock	€35.00
.	Afghanistan	Galway Crystal 12" Clifden Waisted Vase	€62.26
.	.	Galway Crystal Clock	€35.00
.	Pakistan	Galway Crystal 12" Clifden Waisted Vase	€62.26
.	.	Galway Crystal Clock	€35.00
.	France	Encyclopaedia of Ireland	€58.00
.	(Incoming)		
.	Iceland	Galway Crystal 10" Vase	€49.00
.	(Incoming)		
.	Israel	Galway Crystal 10" Vase	€50.00
.	(Incoming)		
.	Rome	Galway Crystal Cross	€50.00
.	.	Galway Crystal Cross	€50.00
.	Israel	Belleek China 12" Vase	€83.00
.	.	Belleek China Candles	€67.00
.	.	Declan Killen Silver Cufflinks (Newgrange)	€65.00
.	.	Newbridge Silver Clock	€50.00

Year	Country	Item	Value
.	Egypt	Belleek China Candlebox	€75.00
.	.	Declan Killen Silver Cufflinks (Newgrange)	€65.00
.	.	Newbridge Silver Clock	€50.00
.	Norway	Encyclopaedia of Ireland	€55.00
	(Incoming)		
Jan	Palestine	Galway Crystal 9" Burren Vase	€65.00
	(Incoming)		
Apr	Palestine	Tipperary Crystal Rotation Bowl	€140.00
	(Incoming)		
.	Russia	Middleton Rare Whiskey	€85.00
	(Incoming)		
.	.	Set of Two Waterford Crystal Whiskey Tumblers	€91.00
.			€35.00
	(Incoming)	Book entitled: 'Dublin A Celebration' by Pat Liddy	
.	.	Total	€1,649.82
2005	.	.	.
Minister for Foreign Affairs	.	.	.
.	Ukraine/Russia	Waterford Crystal Candlesticks	€130.00
.	Ukraine/Russia	Cufflinks – Declan Killen	€80.00
.	Ukraine/Russia	Cufflinks – Declan Killen	€80.00
.	Ukraine/Russia	Cufflinks – Declan Killen	€80.00
.	.	.	.
.	Palestine	Declan Killen Silver Cufflinks	€69.00
.	Palestine	Declan Killen Silver Cufflinks	€69.00
.	Palestine	Celtic Warrior Wallet & Cufflink Set	€40.00

Questions - Written Answers

Year	Country	Item	Value
.	Israel	Celtic Warrior Wallet & Cufflink Set	€40.00
.	Israel	Celtic Warrior Wallet & Cufflink Set	€40.00
.	Israel	Cross Pen with gold harp	€40.00
.	.	Total	€668.00
2006	.	.	.
Minister for Foreign Affairs	.	.	.
.	Ethiopia	Galway Crystal Desk Set & DVD of River-dance	€100.00
.	.	Celtic Warrior cufflinks and wallet	€40.00
.	.	Leather wallet embossed with harp	€10.00
.	.	Leather wallet embossed with harp	€10.00
.	.	Crystal letter opener	€25.00
.	.	Crystal letter opener	€25.00
.	Estonia	Celtic Warrior wallet & cufflink set	€40.00
.	(Incoming)		
.			
.	Japan	Declan Killen Oval C-Link Cufflinks	€70.00
.	.	Cross Pen with gold Harp	€50.00
.	China	Yeats Poetry Collection book	€110.00
.	.	Declan Killen Oval C-Link Cufflinks	€70.00
.	.	Patrick Francis Scarf	€15.00
.	Greece	Bernadette Madden Scarf	€50.00
.	(Incoming)		
.	Turkey	Celtic Warrior Cufflink Set	€40.00
.	(Incoming)		
.	USA	Celtic Warrior wallet & cufflink set	€40.00
.	(Incoming)		
.	.	Celtic Warrior wallet & cufflink set	€40.00

Year	Country	Item	Value
.	.	Celtic Warrior wallet & cufflink set	€40.00
.	.	Total	€775.00
.	.	.	.
2007	.	.	.
Minister for Foreign Affairs	.	.	.
.	Bethlehem	Cufflinks	€110.00
.	.	Cufflink& Wallet Set	€40.00
.	.	Fountain Pen with Harp	€30.00
.	.	Fountain Pen with Harp	€30.00
.	Israel	Brooch	€60.00
.	.	Cross Pen with Gold Harp	€50.00
.	Egypt	Crystal Desk Set	€75.00
.	.	Cross Pen with Gold Harp	€50.00
.	.	Cross Pen with Gold Harp	€50.00
.	.	Fountain Pen with Harp	€30.00
.	.	Fountain Pen with Harp	€30.00
.	Lebanon	Cufflinks	€80.00
.	France (Bordeaux)	Cufflinks	€90.00
.	Sudan	Crystal Frame	€120.00
.	.	Cufflinks	€70.00
.	.	Cufflinks	€70.00
.	.	Cufflinks	€70.00
.	.	Cufflink & Wallet Set	€40.00
.	.	Cufflink & Wallet Set	€40.00
.	Chad	Crystal Frame	€120.00
.	.	Cross pen with Gold Harp	€50.00
.	.	Silver Brooch	€60.00
.	Bosnia	Celtic Frame	€50.00
.	Belgrade	Cufflinks	€40.00
.	.	Celtic Frame	€50.00
.	Pristina	Crystal Frame	€120.00
.	.	Enibas Cufflinks	€110.00
.	Italy (Bobbio)	Cufflinks	€60.00
.	.	Cufflinks	€110.00

Questions - Written Answers

Year	Country	Item	Value
.	.	Celtic Cross	€60.00
.	Japan	Commemorative Prints 50th Anniversary Ireland-Japan relations	€368.00
.	.	Commemorative Prints 50th Anniversary Ireland-Japan relations	€368.00
.	.	Commemorative Prints 50th Anniversary Ireland-Japan relations	€368.00
.	.	Total	€3,069.00
2008	.	.	.
Minister for Foreign Affairs	.	.	.
.	Timor Leste	Crystal Cufflinks	€160.00
.	.	Cufflinks	€110.00
.	.	Gold Cross Pen	€80.00
.	.	Crystal Frame	€50.00
.	.	Crystal Frame	€50.00
.	.	Crystal Celtic Cross	€50.00
.	Argentina	Crystal Rose Bowl	€100.00
.	Kenya	Waterford Crystal Cufflinks	€160.00
.	.	Declan Killen Cufflinks	€70.00
.	.	Silver Picture Frame	€50.00
.	.	Total	€880.00
2009	.	.	.
Minister for Foreign Affairs	.	.	.
.	Mexico	Veronique Didi beaded taffeta silk scarf	€110.00
.	.	Louise Kennedy Tulip T Lights	€40.00
.	.	Newbridge Tower Clock	€40.00
.	.	Jerpoint Vase	€55.00

Year	Country	Item	Value
.	.	Newbridge Card holder	€15.00
.	Cuba	Waterford Crystal cufflinks	€144.00
.	.	Jerpoint vase	€55.00
.	.	Jerpoint dish	€40.00
.	.	NewBridge Tower Clock	€40.00
.	.	Jerpoint Paperweight	€30.00
.	USA (Washington)	Declan Killen Brooch	€190.00
.	.	Total	€759.00
2010	.	.	.
Minister for Foreign Affairs	.	.	.
.	Egypt	Bog Oak Pen	€55.00
.	.	Declan Killen Celtic Cufflinks	€85.00
.	.	Declan Killen Celtic Cufflinks	€85.00
.	Spain (Madrid)	Bog Oak Pen	€55.00
.	Timor Leste	Tipperary Crystal Vase	€80.00
.	.	.	.
.	USA (Washington)	Seamus Heaney Box Set	€75.00
.	Germany (Berlin)	Bog Oak Pen	€55.00
.	Bosnia & Herzegovina	Jerpoint Dish	€40.00
.	Cuba	Thomas Diem Large Bowl	€35.00
.	Shenzhen	Waterford Crystal Frame	€85.00
.	Beijing	Waterford Crystal Rose Bowl	€100.00
.	.	Waterford Crystal Siren Bowl	€160.00
.	.	.	.
.	Shanghai	Waterford Crystal Rose Bowl	€100.00
.	Dalian	Waterford Crystal Frame	€50.00
.	Bulgaria	Bog Oak Pen	€55.00
.	.	Newbridge Silver Tower clock	€40.00

Questions - Written Answers

Year	Country	Item	Value
.	.	Newbridge Silver Tower clock	€40.00
.	.	Newbridge Silver Caesar pen	€25.00
.	Romania	Design Yard Cuf-flinks	€120.00
.	.	Bog oak pen	€55.00
.	.	Newbridge Silver Tower clock	€40.00
.	Turkey	Tipperary Crystal 12" Spiral Vase	€80.00
.	.	Total	€1,515.00
2011	.	.	.
Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade	.	.	.
.	USA (New York)	Bernadette Madden Print	€125.00
.	.	Bernadette Madden Print	€125.00
.	UK	Framed "Fáilte" Ogham Stone	€180.00
.	(Incoming)		
.	Russia (Moscow)	Tipperary Crystal 10" Pearl Bowl	€68.00
.	.	Tipperary Crystal mantle Clock	€35.00
.	Bulgaria	Declan Killen Cuf-flinks	€99.00
.	.	Total	€632.00
2012	.	.	.
Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade	.	.	.
.	Israel	Declan Killen Cuf-flinks	€85.00
.	.	Bog Oak Twist Pen	€55.00
.	.	Tipperary Crescent Frame 5"x7"	€50.00
.	China	Chess Set	€135.00
.	Armenia	Newbridge Prelude Cufflinks	€28.93
.	.	Bog Oak pen	€55.00
.	.	.	.
.	Georgia	Newbridge Cufflinks	€28.93
.	.	Bog Oak Pen	€55.00

Year	Country	Item	Value
.	.	Silk Notebook	€25.00
.	.	Bog Oak Pen	€55.00
.	Azerbaijan	Bog Oak Pen	€55.00
.	.	Caesar Pen	€24.79
.	.	Celtic Cufflinks	€7.00
.	.	Celtic Design Cufflinks	€7.00
.	.	Newbridge Cufflinks	€28.93
.	Uganda	Bog Oak Twist Pen	€55.00
.	.	Newbridge Tower Clock	€33.06
.	.		
.	.		
.	.	Jerpoint Paperweight Small	€27.50
.	.	Caesar Pen	€24.79
.	.	Newbridge Brooch Rose	€33.60
.	.		
.	.	Newbridge Cufflinks Mona Lisa	€28.93
.	.	Compact Mirror Plain - Rectangle	€12.40
.	.		
.	.		
.	Kenya	Bog Oak Twist pen	€55.00
.	.	Galway Crystal Leah Paperweight	€35.00
.	.	Galway Crystal Leah Paperweight	€35.00
.	.	Newbridge Key Ring	€10.00
.	.	Galway Crystal Leah Paperweight	€35.00
.	.	Blue Harp cufflinks	€7.00
.	EU	Newbridge Carriage Clock	€61.98
.	(Incoming)		
.	USA	Clodagh Reddan 3 Person Currach	€160.00
.	(Incoming)		
.	.	Total	€1,309.84
2013	.	.	.
Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade	.	.	.

Questions - Written Answers

Year	Country	Item	Value
.	Romania	Newbridge Tower Clock	€33.06
	(Incoming)		
.	IMF	Patrick Francis Scarf	€15.00
	(Incoming)		
.	Turkey	Cross Pen	€26.90
.	.	Newbridge Flow Clock	€24.79
.	.	A History of Ireland in 100 Objects	€15.00
.	.	Blue harp cufflinks	€7.00
.	.	Blue harp cufflinks	€7.00
.	.	Blue harp cufflinks	€7.00
.	.	Blue harp cufflinks	€7.00
.	Canada	Wild Goose Studio Plaque	€45.00
	(Incoming)		
.	Japan	A History of Ireland in 100 Objects	€15.00
	(Incoming)		
.	.	Book – Dublin by Paul Harper	€10.00
.	USA	Tipperary Crystal Picture Frame 5” x 7”	€50.00
	(Incoming)		
.	China (Beijing)	Tipperary Crystal Picture Frame 5” x 7”	
			€50.00
.	.	Waterford Crystal Somerset Frame 5 x 7	€85.00
.	.	Framed Wild Geese (The Wild Goose Studio)	€60.00
.	.	Belleek Picture Frame Ceramic	€50.00
.	.	Giles Norman Photographic Framed Prints	€55.00
.	China (Shanghai)	Tipperary Crystal Picture Frame 5” x 7”	€50.00
.	.	Total	€612.75
.	.	.	.
.	.	Overall Total	€16,832.40

International Agreements

65. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his position regarding possible ratification of the Antarctic Treaty; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43995/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): The question of Ireland's ratification of the Antarctic Treaty and related agreements comprising the Antarctic Treaty System (ATS) has been examined in some detail by the Government Departments and Offices concerned. While the objectives and the achievements of the ATS are of considerable importance and the commitment of the signatories is to be commended, preparation for ratification by Ireland would impose substantial administrative burdens on several Government Departments which could not be supported at the present time.

Diplomatic Representation

66. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade in relation to the case of a person (details supplied) whose predicament was raised with him before, if he has had or will have direct contact with the Greek Ambassador to Ireland on this matter; if he shares this Deputy's concerns about the plight and welfare of this Albanian citizen who is married to an Irish citizen; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44043/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I am aware of the situation concerning the person referred to by the Deputy. As he is not an Irish citizen it is not possible for my Department to offer him consular assistance. The Greek authorities are under no legal obligation to assist our Embassy with any requests made in connection with this case, as we have no *locus standi* in the matter. However, on hearing of his detention, and notwithstanding the fact that he is not a citizen of Ireland, the Irish Embassy in Athens made contact with the Greek police in an effort to convey the Irish Government's interest in this case on the basis that he is married to an Irish citizen. It was made clear to our Embassy that the authorities in Crete would not provide them with any information regarding this case as no Irish citizen was involved. To clarify further, our Embassy has certain rights of communication and contact with Irish citizens in Greece to facilitate the exercise of our consular functions under the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations (1963). The Embassy has no such rights for other persons, even if they are related to Irish citizens and I have no basis on which to raise this case with my Greek counterpart.

Northern Ireland Issues

67. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his proposals to have further discussions with the Northern Ireland Secretary of State and with Members of the Northern Ireland Executive in relation to the establishment of the Civic Forum; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44073/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): Paragraph 34 of Strand One of the Good Friday Agreement provided for the establishment of a consultative Civic Forum. Section 56 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 required the First Minister and the deputy First Minister, with the approval of the Assembly, to make arrangements for obtaining the views of the Civic Forum. The Forum was set up in October 2000 and was suspended along with the Northern Ireland Assembly in 2002. Following the restoration of devolved pow-

ers in May 2007, the then First Minister and deputy First Minister considered the position of the Civic Forum in the re-established devolved arrangements and commissioned a review of the effectiveness and appropriateness of its structure, operation and membership. In April 2013 the NI Assembly voted in favour of an SDLP motion to re-establish the Civic Forum. In my ongoing contacts with the Secretary of State and with the Northern Ireland Executive, including in the context of the North South Ministerial Council, I have pressed for the re-establishment of the Civic Forum as a valuable and, as yet, unimplemented provision of the Good Friday Agreement. I welcome the recent consultations which Richard Haass, Independent Chair of the Panel of Parties, and Meghan O'Sullivan, Independent Vice-Chair of the Panel of Parties, have undertaken with community groups and with representatives of wider civil society in order to ensure that their views and perspectives are considered in the context of the talks process.

I have previously put on the record of the Dáil that I support the establishment of a Civic Forum which would provide for a broad range of voices on community relations and stimulate informed public debate in relation to key societal challenges. On my forthcoming visits to Northern Ireland, including when I visit Derry tomorrow, I will continue the practice of engaging with civil society representatives when time permits.

I will be hosting a Reconciliation Networking Forum event in Dublin Castle on 30 October 2013 for people who are involved in community, peace-building, public policy or reconciliation work, to discuss what civil society, including the community sector, can and should do to meet the reconciliation challenges ahead. This is in line with the view of the Government that a strong and resilient civic society can play an important role in building a more reconciled and prosperous Northern Ireland.

Diplomatic Representation Expenditure

68. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the representational allowances paid to staff working overseas in embassies, consular offices and other areas, under the following headings; the grade of staff to whom these allowances are paid; the amount of the allowance per person per year; the reason for the allowance whether they are vouched or unvouched; the number of staff that benefitted from these payments; if they are paid for the acquisition of private possessions or are purchases the property of the State; the total amount expended on these allowances overall; and an average figure per embassy or consular office per eligible staff member; and if there are any plans to change this. [44088/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): Officers serving at diplomatic missions abroad are required to carry out certain representational duties in line with both the Department's strategies and mission business plans. Official promotion forms a significant part of the workload of all missions and plays an important part in the achievement of mission and Departmental objectives, including the promotion of Ireland's political, economic, trade and cultural interests in the European Union and the wider world. A substantial proportion of representational work is associated with St Patrick's Day events, which are crucial in maintaining contacts and influence with business and political leaders. Representation expenditure (RPN) is incurred within clearly defined Departmental guidelines, which are subject to regular review, and, in general, officers above the grade of HEO / Third Secretary are refunded on the basis of receipts for costs incurred. RPN spending, like all Departmental spending, is subject to rigorous internal controls as well as external audit. RPN resources are shared between Heads of Mission and other diplomatic staff - a total of approximately 253 officers across the mission network in 2012 - with varying amounts allocated to individual officers according to the business priorities of the mission. Expenditure on representational work varies

from location to location in line with the staffing complement at each mission, as well as the local cost of living.

The RPN budget has been steadily cut in recent years in line with overall cost-cutting measures and is now well below 2003/2004 levels (€2,442,000 in 2004 compared with €1,706,577 in 2012).

The breakdown per mission in 2012 was as follows:

RPN per Mission 2012	TOTAL
ABU DHABI	16,268.85
ABUJA	20,177.14
ANKARA	20,177.20
ATHENS	18,824.34
ATLANTA - CONSULATE	15,206.24
BEIJING	51,643.89
BERLIN	35,066.43
BERNE	12,552.73
BOSTON	16,996.96
BRASILIA	20,997.66
BRATISLAVA	12,702.76
BRUSSELS (EMBASSY)	21,958.17
BRUSSELS (P.F.P.)	2,914.88
BRUSSELS (PR-EU)	80,279.41
BUCHAREST	17,360.97
BUDAPEST	16,023.15
BUENOS AIRES	22,500.00
CAIRO	20,158.48
CANBERRA	32,622.88
CHICAGO	16,888.83
COPENHAGEN	16,886.34
EDINBURGH	8,489.07
GENEVA	33,942.87
HELSINKI	19,968.77
HOLY SEE	1,688.04
KUALA LUMPUR	24,020.09
LISBON	15,087.21
LJUBLJANA	16,124.30
LONDON	87,570.62
LUXEMBOURG	11,994.13
MADRID	28,777.26
MEXICO	30,890.23
MOSCOW	31,410.07
NEW DELHI	29,241.41
NEW YORK - C.G.	85,817.81
NEW YORK - PMUN	62,926.59
NICOSIA	9,177.60

RPN per Mission 2012	TOTAL
OSCE - VIENNA	10,657.61
OSLO	24,737.44
OTTAWA	30,644.67
PARIS	52,341.84
PRAGUE	22,171.70
PRETORIA	24,634.48
RAMALLAH	10,974.84
RIGA	10,101.08
RIYADH	24,371.79
ROME	32,060.36
SAN FRANCISCO	16,914.77
SEOUL	22,609.56
SHANGHAI	24,421.84
SINGAPORE	22,584.90
SOFIA	16,013.08
STOCKHOLM	17,274.42
STRASBOURG	16,871.94
SYDNEY	17,025.52
TALLINN	10,232.38
TEHRAN	982.78
TEL AVIV	17,903.88
THE HAGUE	28,096.82
TOKYO	70,047.66
VALLETTA	10,575.01
VIENNA	16,719.22
VILNIUS	7,589.08
WARSAW	29,254.43
WASHINGTON DC	133,430.68
TOTAL	1,706,577.16

In a separate scheme, the Department also provides financial assistance to officers going on posting abroad towards the cost of representational furniture and equipment. The scheme covers a small range of items which are necessary to provide a suitable home environment for the purposes of official entertainment, with particular regard to the representational areas of an officer's residence. The amount provided ranges from €2,000-€4,000 depending on the officer's grade. It may be paid only in respect of an officer's first posting. The items purchased may be retained by the officer for use during future postings. A total of €64,268 was refunded to officers in 2012.

Property Taxation Collection

69. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Finance the reason an application to have the local property tax deducted from a person's old age pension (details supplied) in Dublin 9 has not been completed despite the application being lodged in July of this year; when this process will be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43941/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that the delay in implementing the preferred Local Property Tax (LPT) payment option in this case occurred because the person in question is not a recipient of the pension type selected on the LPT 1 Return. I understand the LPT deduction at source scheme for Department of Social Protection (DSP) pensions operates by Revenue advising DSP of the individual deductions via electronic file transfer. The individual case data is transferred between the Revenue and DSP computer systems and is downloaded exactly as provided by the taxpayer. Revenue cannot validate the accuracy of the information provided, including the selected payment type, in advance of the electronic file transfer. Specific problems are only identified when an individual transaction fails. Once a transaction fails, DSP notifies Revenue who in turn contacts the taxpayer.

Revenue has only recently received confirmation of the transaction failure in this case and is making immediate direct contact with the person in question to discuss the various payment options available to her, particularly having regard to the period of time that has passed since the LPT 1 Return was lodged. I am assured that the Revenue official making direct contact with the person will outline the various payment options and will assist her in setting up whichever option suits her individual circumstances best.

IBRC Mortgage Loan Book

70. **Deputy Anthony Lawlor** asked the Minister for Finance the reason persons who wish to buy back their loans from the liquidated Irish Bank Resolution Corporation have been told that they cannot avail of this facility despite it being made available to other loan owners such as corporate entities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43928/13]

74. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance if he considers that the sale by the Special Liquidator of Irish Bank Resolution Corporation mortgages to the exclusion of bids from the holders of said mortgages would result primarily in a disproportionately large number of bids from bigger financial institutions, many of which would likely have benefitted from the State guarantee of former Anglo Irish Bank liabilities; if he considers this a fair and appropriate practice considering many of the mortgages are well-performing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44011/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 70 and 74 together.

It is important to note that the contractual terms and conditions of customer mortgages and other borrowings have not changed as a result of the appointment of the Special Liquidators to IBRC nor will they change as a result of the ultimate sale of these obligations to a third party.

The Special Liquidators have given significant consideration to and have sought independent advice from PWC in relation to how the residential mortgage portfolio and other loans in IBRC are to be dealt with. Following that independent advice, the Special Liquidators have decided that the residential mortgage book would be split into four segments consisting of performing, non-performing, owner occupier and buy to let mortgages with a view to maximising market interest.

I am advised by the Special Liquidators that the decision to offer the residential mortgage book for sale in this way was arrived at having regard to the scale of the process and size of the IBRC loan book. Furthermore the Special Liquidators have confirmed that the decision to sell these loans as part of a portfolio is the most efficient method of disposal and the one which is

most likely to maximise ultimate sales realisations for the Special Liquidators having regard to the public interest.

Government Deficit

71. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide, for the most recent five years for which data is available, the interest on Government borrowing as a proportion of GDP. [43988/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The following table shows general government interest as a proportion of GDP each year since 2009 (including the projected amount for the current year and 2014).

Interest as proportion of GDP	-	-	-	-	-	-
-	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013f	2014f
General government Interest (€ millions)	3,295	4,974	5,325	6,135	7,645	8,190
GDP (at current market prices)	162,284	158,097	162,600	163,938	165,876	170,611
Interest as % GDP	2.0%	3.1%	3.3%	3.7%	4.6%	4.8%

Source: CSO, Department of Finance

The interest figure shown is the consolidated general government interest figure and reflects interest on a range of debt instruments including Government bonds and EU/IMF programme loans.

General government debt (GGD) is a measure of the total gross consolidated debt of the State and includes National debt, as well as the debt of central and local Government bodies.

GGD has increased substantially in recent years as a result of borrowing to fund a series of budget deficits and the support provided to the financial sector. It is expected to peak at approximately €205.9bn (124.1% GDP) in 2013.

The 0.9 percentage point of GDP increase in 2013 over 2012 reflects, in part, the first interest payments on the floating rates bonds which were issued in February 2013 to replace the IBRC Promissory Notes but also the fact that there was an interest holiday on the Promissory Notes in 2011 and 2012.

Credit Unions Issues

72. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if the confidential data of members of Newbridge Credit Union has been transferred to any other credit union. [43991/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Question is referring to the proposed combination between Newbridge Credit Union and Naas Credit Union. The parties involved in this proposed combination are bound by confidentiality agreements and non-disclosure requirements which ensure that no personal data has been compromised. The Central Bank has confirmed that all parties have been and remain fully conscious of obligations under the Data Protection Acts and the Central Bank and Credit Institutions (Resolution) Act 2011 and continue to comply with all such obligations.

Tax Reliefs Eligibility

73. **Deputy Michael McCarthy** asked the Minister for Finance the process by which a hospital/ clinic may be placed on the approved list of institutions for the purpose of claiming health or medical expenses relief; specifically if due consideration will be given to the addition of a facility (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43996/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): This PQ appears to be a follow up to PQ 32144/13 wherein we explained that a hospital had to be approved by the Minister for Finance in consultation with the Minister for Health. With regard to claims in respect of tax relief for qualifying health expenses where the relevant health care is obtained outside the State, the following is the current position: - (a) the health expenses are allowable provided that the practitioner (GP, consultant or dentist) is entitled under the laws of the country in which the care is provided to practise medicine or dentistry there; (b) the cost of maintenance or treatment in a hospital, nursing home or clinic is allowable provided the expenses are necessarily incurred in association with the services of a practitioner or refer to diagnostic procedures carried out on the advice of a practitioner.

If the claim relates to the years 2007 – 2009 inclusive, the position was that the cost of the services of a practitioner and the cost of maintenance or treatment in a hospital or similar institution approved for the purposes of the relief by the Minister for Finance after consultation with the Minister for Health is allowable.

With regard to the case specified, the claims in respect of 2007 and 2008 relate to a hospital/ clinic that has not been approved. In accordance with the consultation requirements of section 469 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997, officials from my Department have commenced a consultation process with the Department of Health in connection with this request. The process may take up to twelve weeks to conclude and my officials will contact the Deputy once a decision has been reached.

Question No. 74 answered with Question No. 70.

Mortgage Debt

75. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Finance the reason a discount rate was applied to Irish Bank Resolution Corporation loans but this did not apply to residential mortgage holders. [44031/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Special Liquidators are obligated to ensure that the assets of IBRC are sold at a price which maximises the overall return for its creditors including the State. As a result the Special Liquidators are currently in the process of devising and implementing a sales process in respect of these assets. I have been advised by the Special Liquidators that the valuation process is on-going and that the Special Liquidators

tors are taking professional advice as to whether a loan should be sold individually or as part of a portfolio in order to ensure that the maximum value is obtained for that asset within the instructed timeframe. There is an obligation on the Special Liquidators to ensure that the assets of IBRC are sold at a price that is equal to or in excess of the independent valuations that are being obtained. Should a bid not be received that is in excess of the independent valuation obtained, the loan asset will transfer to NAMA at the independent valuation price. In arriving at the valuation of IBRC loan assets (including residential mortgage loan assets), the independent advisers have been advised to apply a discount rate of 4.5% in determining the present value of future cash flows of the asset in the case where a discounted cash flow valuation methodology is employed. Further, a discount of 2.32% will be applied to all loan asset valuations to take into account security and title issues associated with loan assets, to arrive at the Valuation Price. Should the assets not be sold to a qualified bidder at a price that is equal to or in excess of the Valuation Price then the asset/portfolio will transfer to NAMA at that price.

Therefore I, as Minister for Finance, in my Instructions to the Special Liquidators have not differentiated between residential mortgages loan assets and other loan assets for valuation purposes.

The decision concerning how the loans will be packaged for sale and what bidders constitute qualifying bidders for the purposes of the sales process is to be made by the Special Liquidators.

Promissory Notes

76. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Finance the total value of the promissory note deal as it was applied in Budget 2014. [44059/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Prior to the promissory note restructuring I would have had to make provision for a cash payment of €3.1 billion to IBRC in 2014 consisting of €1.8 billion in interest and €1.3 billion in repayment of principal. Under the statistical rules governing the Deficit calculation only promissory note interest costs of €1.8 billion would have been recorded in 2014. The NTMA issued eight new Floating Rate Treasury Bonds to the Central Bank of Ireland in February 2013 to replace the Promissory Notes previously held by IBRC. The bonds have maturities ranging from 25 to 40 years and pay interest every six months based on the six month Euribor interest rate plus an interest margin which averages 2.63% across the eight issues.

As a consequence of this restructuring interest costs are much reduced to circa €0.9 billion next year and it is this revised interest cost that is reflected in the deficit estimate of 4.8% of GDP in 2014.

Additionally, there is a significant benefit to government debt over time due to the lower interest payments, and because the annual cash-flow burden that is required to be funded by the State is much lower as a result of the restructuring.

Property Taxation Administration

77. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Finance the position regarding a person (details supplied) who over estimated their property tax; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44072/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Finance (Local Property Tax) Act

2012 (as amended) sets out how the tax is to be administered and how a residential property is to be valued for Local Property Tax (LPT) purposes. I note that the Deputy raised a similar question in July this year. In my reply to that question (No. 65 on 17 July 2013, 35714/13) I informed the House that, as Local Property Tax (LPT) is a self-assessed tax, it is a matter for the property owner to calculate the tax due based on his or her assessment of the market value of the property. I also informed the House that the Revenue Commissioners had confirmed that if a liable person had genuinely overpaid the tax through an error or mistake, then the person should write to LPT Branch, Government Buildings, Ennis, Co Clare, clearly setting out how the overpayment arose and providing the relevant supporting documentation.

I am further advised by the Commissioners that once the relevant documentation is received LPT Branch will make direct contact with the person. Should it transpire that the person did in fact overpay the 2013 liability then it will be possible to offset some or all of the overpayment to the 2014 liability, or make a repayment.

Tax Reliefs Application

78. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Finance the saving to the Exchequer that would arise if the current arrangements for landlords, whereby they can claim interest repayments against tax for residential rental properties, was ceased for new entrants and the data upon which this estimate was based; and if he will provide similar details in respect of commercial properties. [44074/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that, subject to certain conditions, landlords may deduct 75% of the interest on money borrowed to purchase, improve or repair residential property from the gross rent when computing their rental profits for tax purposes on that property. Interest incurred before the first occupation of the property by a tenant for the purposes of a trade or undertaking, or between lettings, is not deductible. I am also informed by the Commissioners that the information provided for interest relief for rental property is based on claims for such relief on all rental properties included in personal income tax returns filed by non-PAYE taxpayers declaring interest on borrowings to be offset against rental income assessable under Case V, Schedule D. It is not possible to separately identify how much of this cost is associated with commercial property.

Based on personal income tax returns filed by non-PAYE taxpayers for 2011, the latest year available, the amount of tax foregone by allowing a deduction for interest on borrowings to be offset against all rental income assessable under Case V, Schedule D for both residential and commercial property is estimated at €690 million.

This estimate is based on assuming that tax relief was allowed at the top income tax rate of 41% and the figure provided could, therefore, be regarded as the maximum Exchequer cost in respect of those taxpayers. The figures for 2011 are subject to adjustment in the event of late returns being filed or where returns already filed are subsequently amended.

It should be noted that any corresponding data returned by PAYE taxpayers in the income tax return form 12 is not captured in the Revenue computer system. However, any PAYE taxpayer with non-PAYE income greater than €3,174 is required to complete an income tax return form 11. This return is the source of the figures provided in this reply.

The saving to the Exchequer from the termination of this tax relief for new claimants would depend on factors such as the numbers of individuals prepared to provide rental property in the current economic climate, the level of borrowings they would require and the extent to which

the removal of the tax relief might be a disincentive to potential investors in this enterprise. As data on these factors is not available there is no basis on which an estimate of the potential yield from such a measure could be compiled.

Property Taxation Administration

79. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Finance the reason the property tax is being withdrawn in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny. [44090/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am informed by Revenue that a key aspect of the work undertaken in regard to Local Property Tax (LPT) was the development of a comprehensive register of residential properties in the State. During the development process, matching difficulties were encountered when drawing the various data sources together, and in some instances the information available was incorrect. As part of its comprehensive communications strategy, Revenue requested that any individual who received an LPT Return for completion in circumstances where he/she was not the liable person, make contact and clarify the correct details of the liable person. Revenue also clearly stated, that in circumstances where a person who incorrectly received a return and did not make contact to clarify the issue, then he/she would be liable for the tax.

Revenue also confirmed that, in the absence of the return, it would seek to collect the estimated amount that was included with the return using a number of enforcement options including mandatory deduction at source from income, pensions, or various other Government payments in accordance with Sections 64, 65, 66 and 67 of the Local Property Tax Act 2012 (as amended).

In regard to the specific case to which the Deputy refers, the difficulties occurred because the person in question did not make contact with Revenue on foot of either the original letter which issued with an LPT 1 Return in March 2013, or the subsequent reminder letter that issued in July 2013, to advise that she was not the liable owner of the property. The July reminder specifically advised the person of the imminent commencement of mandatory deduction at source from her income if she did not address the issue. Because the person still did not engage an instruction issued to her employer to commence deductions.

Revenue has now received confirmation of the correct liable person in regard to the specific property and the Property Register has been updated to reflect the details. Revenue has also issued instructions to cease the mandatory deductions and will shortly contact the person to arrange a refund of any monies deducted.

Apprenticeship Programmes

80. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which apprenticeships are available in all areas throughout the country at present; the uptake of such places; the extent to which the places available meet the demand; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43900/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): In recent years, the impact of the economic downturn has led to a collapse in demand for apprentices from employers, particularly in construction related trades. Significant numbers of apprentices have also been made redundant before completion of their training.

While demand for a number of apprenticeship trades is not expected to recover to pre-recession levels, employment opportunities may emerge in other sectors of the economy not currently covered by the current apprenticeship scheme. Under the Government's Action Plan for Jobs my Department is committed to carrying out a review of the apprenticeship system in 2013. This review is being carried out in order to provide a modern 21st century, realistic and flexible Irish Apprenticeship System, reflective of the relevant skills requirements of industry both in the public and private sectors and potential apprentices including young unemployed jobseekers.

The review of the Apprenticeship System is being undertaken in two phases, the first being the preparation of a background issues paper, and the second a public consultation process – which is being managed by an independent group appointed in May 2013. This phase of the review is currently under way. Following the consultation process, the review group shall recommend options recognising the broad spectrum of vocational training available, for the development of the apprentice formation system, and other work based education/training systems, including, as necessary: - Legislative changes; Model of delivery/curriculum/ range of crafts/ occupations; Funding and finance mechanisms; Provision changes; Staffing and resource implications; Governance changes; Transition actions resulting from recommendations. It is expected that initial recommendations will be received by end 2013.

For the Deputy's information the details below outline the apprentice population by region year to date and the apprenticeship registrations by region year to date. Population by Region 2013 YTD (As of 6/10/2013)

Region	2013 - YTD
Dublin	2580
Midlands	671
Mid West	680
North East	608
North West	275
South East	1392
South West	996
West	465
Total	7667

(As of 6/10/2013) - Registration by Region 2013 YTD

Region	2013 - YTD
Dublin	373
Midlands	125
Mid West	114
North East	121
North West	48
South East	188
South West	202
West	95
Total	1266

Haddington Road Agreement Implementation

81. **Deputy Olivia Mitchell** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will consider treating non-union teachers who are willing to accept the terms of the HRA in the same way as members of the TUI; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43909/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Department Circular 49/2013 sets out the position in relation to the Haddington Road Agreement and the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2013 for teachers in post-primary schools and is available at the following address: http://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0049_2013.pdf

The Agreement applies to teachers employed in Education and Training Board schools (apart from Designated Community Colleges). In general, the FEMPI Act continues to apply to teachers employed in Voluntary Secondary schools. In dual-union schools (Designated Community Colleges and Community and Comprehensive Schools), the FEMPI Act continues to apply to teachers who are not members of TUI.

While certain issues of dual representation require further consideration, the position set out above provides an initial basis for the implementation of the Haddington Road Agreement. It is stressed however, that the application of the Agreement is entirely conditional upon adherence to its terms by the teachers to whom it is applied.

As is the norm with public service collective agreements, the Haddington Road Agreement was negotiated with trade unions which are recognised as representing staff in the public service (including teachers). It is normal practice in the public service that the decision of the trade union recognised as holding representative rights for a particular grade or sector will determine the position for all relevant staff in that grade/sector.

School Enrolments

82. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will clarify the issue regarding catchment areas in relation to national schools; if he will clarify who establishes the catchment areas in the Dublin area; if the catchment areas are laid down by his Department or if they are negotiated locally by school authorities/patrons; the way in which parents can currently gain admission for their children to a school where children have been refused admission as the school is regarded as not within the catchment area of where the child lives; if the proposed amendments to admission policies will change criteria; the appropriate school under current regulations for children living at a particular location (details supplies) in Dublin 5; the way a parent may gain admission for their child to a school other than the designated one; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43914/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): It is the responsibility of the managerial authorities of all schools to implement an enrolment policy in accordance with the Education Act, 1998. In this regard a Board of Management may find it necessary to restrict enrolment to children from a particular area or a particular age group or, occasionally, on the basis of some other criterion. The criteria to be applied by schools in such circumstances are a matter for the schools themselves. This selection process and the enrolment policy on which it is based must be non-discriminatory and must be applied fairly in respect of all applicants. Under section 15 (2) (d) of the Education Act 1998, each school is legally obliged to publish its enrolment policy.

Section 29 of the Education Act 1998 provides parents with an appeal process where a board of management of a school or a person acting on behalf of the Board refuses enrolment to a

student. Where a school refuses to enrol a pupil, the school is obliged to inform parents of their right under Section 29 of the Education Act 1998 to appeal that decision to either the relevant Educational Training Board or to the Secretary General of my Department.

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

As the Deputy will be aware, I recently published a draft General Scheme for an Education (Admission to Schools) Bill, 2013 as well as draft regulations for discussion ahead of enacting legislation. I have referred the draft General Scheme and draft regulations to the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Education and Social Protection, to allow a full public discussion of the proposed legislative framework, including inputs from parents and the education partners.

The Joint Committee has issued an invitation to interested individuals and groups for submissions on the Draft General Scheme of an Education (Admission to Schools) Bill 2013. The Joint Committee's closing date for receipt of same is Wednesday 31st October (at 3 pm). Full details of this request are available on the Oireachtas website.

Public Procurement Regulations

83. **Deputy Luke 'Ming' Flanagan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on whether the tens of millions in public contracts that were negotiated with the private bus operators by the Bus Éireann employee in the Dundalk School Transport Office, whose irregular actions were reported to An Garda Síochána, were awarded in accordance with the EU Directives on Procurement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43933/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): Bus Éireann has confirmed that the irregular cash transactions identified through its own internal checks at its office in Dundalk were confined to a small number of ticket payments and had no bearing on the separate process of awarding contracts. The award of contracts for school transport services administered by the Dundalk office was in accordance with procurement obligations and instructions.

Student Universal Support Ireland Administration

84. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will expedite a Student Universal Support Ireland application in respect of a person (details supplied); and if he will expedite this application. [43955/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): For student grants purposes, students are categorised according to their circumstances either as students dependent on parents or a legal guardian, or as independent mature students. A student may be assessed as an independent mature student if he/she has attained the age of 23 on the 1st of January of the year of first entry to an approved course or of re-entry following a break in studies of at least three years, and is not ordinarily resident with his/her parents from the previous 1 October. Otherwise he/she would continue to be assessed on the basis of his/her parents' income.

Officials in my Department have confirmed with Student Universal Support Ireland that the student referred to by the Deputy applied initially as an independent student. He was ineligible

to be assessed as an independent student and reapplied as a mature dependent student on 5th October 2013. This application is currently awaiting provisional assessment and the student will be notified directly of the outcome.

School Transport Appeals

85. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding a school transport application in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43993/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): Bus Éireann which operates the School Transport Scheme on behalf of my Department has advised that the child in question is availing of a morning service from her new address. My Department has offered the family a Special Transport Grant towards the cost of their own private transport arrangements in the afternoon.

School Staffing Appeals Mechanism

86. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if it is intended to reduce the number of teachers in a school (details supplied) and, if so, the reason for the reduction; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43997/13]

91. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his Department plans to withdraw a teacher from a school (details supplied) in County Cork at the end of this month; the reasons this change is proposed; if his attention has been drawn to the adverse consequences for pupils and staff or withdrawing a teacher during the school year; and if he is prepared to review this matter. [44044/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I propose to take Questions Nos. 86 and 91 together.

The criteria used for the allocation of teaching posts to schools, which is available on the Department website, includes the provision whereby schools experiencing rapid increases in enrolment can apply for additional permanent mainstream posts on developing grounds, using projected enrolment. The staffing schedule also includes an appeals mechanism for schools to submit an appeal under certain criteria, including developing grounds, to an independent Appeals Board.

The school referred to by the Deputy was granted a developing post on a provisional basis, pending confirmation of enrolments on 30th September 2013. The school did not reach the required enrolment to retain the post. The school have submitted an appeal to the Primary Staffing Appeals Board to retain this post. The appeal will be considered at the next meeting of the Primary Staffing Appeals Board which will take place on 22 October and the school will be notified accordingly. The Appeal Board operates independently of the Department and its decision is final.

Site Acquisitions

87. **Deputy Patrick Nulty** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will provide a breakdown per site of expenditure by his Department on purchasing school sites over the past

five years; the measures his Department has taken to ensure the best value for money in school site purchasing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44018/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): As requested by the Deputy I have attached details of school sites purchased over the past five years. I have also included details in relation to funding for site purchases, provided by my Department to the then Vocational Education Committees (now Education and Training Boards).

Price information regarding site acquisitions is commercially sensitive and the release of such information for 2012 and 2013 at this time would prejudice future and ongoing negotiations elsewhere in the State. Accordingly, I am not in a position to provide details for sites acquired in 2013 or to provide a list of payment amounts for sites in 2012.

As the Deputy will be aware land prices can vary depending on numerous factors, such as location, topography, proximity to other facilities and location of services. Even in similar locations, factors such as availability of services, site features and development costs makes it difficult to compare site prices on a straight line basis. Sites that may be superficially similar may have individual features which make one suitable for school development while another is not. I can confirm however that in general the asking price for land on the market has declined in line with overall property market trends, and that my Department officials apply due diligence to secure appropriate sites at competitive prices.

[<ahref="/debates%20authoring/webattachments.nsf/0/38E1F69CADFD3F2180257C070056143A/\$File/Attachment%20for%20PQ%2044018_13.docx?openelement">Table 1]

Third Level Expenditure

88. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the average annual cost to his Department of educating a third level student to degree level; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44028/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The estimated cost to the Exchequer for a degree course is €6,500 per student per year. As the Deputy will be aware students who qualify under my Department's free fees schemes are liable to pay the Student Contribution which currently stands at €2,500. The Contribution is paid by the Exchequer in respect of students who qualify under my Department's Student Grant Scheme (some 40%) and therefore, in such cases the estimated cost to my Department would increase to €9,000 per student per year.

Special Educational Needs Services Provision

89. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a person (details supplied) will be able to access a school place to meet their special needs. [44029/13]

95. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will support a matter regarding a child with autism spectrum disorder (details supplied). [44080/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I propose to take Questions Nos. 89 and 95 together.

The child referred to by the Deputies is currently enrolled in a special school and from the details supplied is due to transition at the end of the current school year. The Deputies will be

aware that one of the functions of the National Council for Special Education (NCSE), through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs), is to provide support to schools, and parents/guardians of children with special educational needs. All schools have the names and contact details of their local SENOs. Parents may also contact their local SENOs directly to discuss their child's special educational needs, using the contact details available on www.ncse.ie.

The role of the SENOs in planning for the transition of children from one stage of schooling to another can include the provision of information to parents and or liaising between schools and parents. The NEPS psychologists can also be involved in supporting the transition of pupils with complex special needs. Information including general principles for planning for transitioning are also available on the NCSE website.

Special Educational Needs Services Provision

90. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the resource hours available to pupils with a rare syndrome called I.P. 36 Deletion, part of 1st Chromosome deleted and only 12 in the country in primary schools. [44039/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I wish to advise the Deputy that in primary schools, additional teaching supports for pupils with special education needs are provided through two channels.

Under the terms of the General Allocation Model (GAM) of teaching supports, schools are resourced to cater for pupils whose educational psychological assessment places them in the high incidence, or less complex, disability category. All mainstream Primary schools have been allocated additional teaching resources under the GAM to cater for children with high incidence special educational needs.

Separately, the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) allocates additional resource teaching hours to schools for children who have been assessed within the low incidence, or more complex, category of special need, as defined by my Department's Circular Sp Ed 02/05. The NCSE operates within my Department's established criteria for the allocation of Special Education supports and the staffing resources available to my Department. Schools were advised to apply to the NCSE for resource teaching and SNA support for the 2013/14 school year by 15th March 2013 and the NCSE has published details of Resource Teaching allocations for all schools on its website www.ncse.ie, based on the number of valid applications received.

In order to meet any late demand for resource teaching support which may have arisen between 15th March, 2013 and the start of the school year, the NCSE requested all schools to submit outstanding applications for resource teaching support to the NCSE by 20th September, 2013. A small number of applications have also been received after 20th September, which are still under consideration. The NCSE intend to notify schools of revised resource teaching allocations in the coming weeks.

It is a matter for schools to monitor and utilise their allocation of additional teaching support, including support allocated under the GAM, to best support the needs of identified pupils, in accordance with my Department's guidance. All schools have the names and contact details of their local SENOs. Parents may also contact their local SENOs directly to discuss their child's special educational needs, using the contact details available on www.ncse.ie.

Question No. 91 answered with Question No. 86.

Student Grant Scheme Appeals

92. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of Student Universal Support Ireland applicants still awaiting decisions for 2012-2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44057/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I understand from Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI) that no applicant is awaiting a decision from SUSI on their grant application for 2012/13. All those who applied for a grant in 2012/13 have at this stage been either awarded, refused or had their applications cancelled, whether at the applicant's request (where not proceeding) or for failure to provide complete or sufficient documents. Applicants may seek to have the decision on their application reviewed on appeal. The appeals process is a separate statutory process that follows from the giving of a decision on an application by SUSI and separate statutory timeframes apply.

Student Grant Scheme Administration

93. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of Student Universal Support Ireland new staff that have been taken on for 2012 and 2013 to work with SUSI what the positions were and where the jobs were advertised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44058/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): City of Dublin Education and Training Board (CDETb) is the designated single awarding authority for new student grants in Ireland. SUSI was formally established in early 2012 as a new unit within CDETb and having a staff complement of 65 full time equivalents. This staff complement is variable during the year to match the flows of grant processing work. Staff were assigned to fill these posts in 2012 from four main sources: firstly by deployment of existing staff of CDETb, secondly through redeployment from the public service, thirdly via the temporary clerical panels operated by the Public Appointments Service through public advertising and via its website www.publicjobs.ie and fourthly through a contract with a service provider engaged to provide highly flexible insourced and outsourced staff and support services to SUSI. One post was filled by secondment from the civil service following the circulation by PAS of notices within the civil service.

Two new additional management posts were approved for SUSI in March 2013, one at principal officer level as Head of Operations and one at assistant principal level as Grants Processing Manager. Both posts were filled by the Public Appointments Service (PAS), initially through circulated notices within the civil and public service and subsequently by way of public competition advertised via its website www.publicjobs.ie.

Three further additional management posts at assistant principal level were approved for SUSI in May 2013. Following circulated notices within the civil and public service, these posts remain unfilled following the circulation by PAS of notices of redeployment or secondment opportunities within the civil and public service. As PAS were not in a position to run public competitions within the required timeframes, public competitions were organised for direct recruitment by CDETb. These posts were advertised on the website of CDETb and on the PAS website www.publicjobs.ie and in one national newspaper. 23 additional grants processing and assessing staff were also approved for SUSI in May 2013. These positions were at the clerical officer/grade 3 level and were taken on by way of short term contracts of seasonal employment via the temporary clerical panels operated by the Public Appointments Service through public advertising and via its website www.publicjobs.ie.

School Patronage

94. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when decisions will be made in relation to the patronage of eight new second level schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44067/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The application assessment process for the patronage of the new post-primary schools due to open in September 2015 and 2016 is currently underway. As part of this process, my Department will prepare a report for consideration by the New Schools Establishment Group who will submit a report to me for final consideration and decision. I expect to be in a position to announce my decision later this year.

Question No. 95 answered with Question No. 89.

National Lottery Regulator Establishment

96. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when he will make an appointment to the office of the regulator of the national lottery; the selection criteria and terms and conditions to be applied; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43934/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): It is envisaged that the Regulator of the National Lottery will be appointed and the Regulator's office established in early 2014. The functions of the Regulator and the terms on which he or she shall hold office are provided for in part 3 of the National Lottery Act 2013. The selection criteria for the appointment of the Regulator will be determined by my Department in consultation with the Public Appointments Service.

EU Programmes

97. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the position regarding the PEACE IV programme, the total funding to be allocated to this programme both North and South, the likely timescale for commencement of the programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44055/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The SEUPB is currently involved in drafting the Operational Programme for the PEACE IV Programme in close consultation with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in Ireland and the Department of Finance and Personnel in Northern Ireland. It is anticipated that the draft Operational Programme for PEACE IV will be presented to the Northern Ireland Executive and the Irish Government in 2014. Formal submission to the EU Commission will take place following the agreement of the two Governments and the conclusion of negotiations on the Cohesion Legislative Package with the European Parliament. While significant progress was made by the Irish Presidency on the Cohesion Legislative Package, negotiations are continuing with the Council and European Parliament to finalise the package. Until such time as agreement is reached, operational programmes cannot be agreed with the European Commission.

On 8 February 2013 the European Council agreement on the MFF included provision for funding of €150 million towards a new PEACE Programme as part of the EU Cohesion package. I also welcome the inclusion of an additional €50m UK funding for PEACE IV which the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland announced in the context of the Building a Prosperous

and United Community pact signed in Downing Street on 14 June. The total contributions from Ireland and the United Kingdom to the PEACE programme will be determined in the context of the programme planning and the final outcome of the negotiations on the Cohesion Legislative Package with the European Parliament.

Regional Aid

98. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of applications received by his Department in the years 2010, 2011, 2012 and to date in 2013 for regional or investment aid in each of the eligible regions; and the rate of approval in respect of these applications across all regions. [43925/13]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The question posed by the Deputy requires a significant volume of information to be gathered and collated. It has not been possible to collate the information within the timeframe given. Consequently, my Department will provide the information to the Deputy as soon as possible in written format.

Action Plan for Jobs

99. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the means by which his Action Plan for Jobs is addressing youth unemployment in County Kerry; the number of jobs that have been created through this action plan in the county; the areas they have been created in; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44027/13]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): This Government is committed to addressing the problem of youth unemployment. Our primary strategy is to create the environment for economic recovery through competitiveness, enterprise and job creation through the Action Plan for Jobs. In addition, the Government recognises the need for measures to support the unemployed and keep jobseekers close to the labour market. In this context, the major elements of the Government's response are set out in Pathways to Work, which is aimed at ensuring that as many as possible of the job vacancies that are created as the economy recovers are filled by people from the Live Register - with a particular focus on those who are long-term unemployed or at risk of long-term unemployment.

Pathways to Work programmes such as JobBridge, Springboard, Momentum, JobsPlus and the ICT Action Plan, are delivered by the Departments of Social Protection and Education and Skills. The Department of Social Protection is also working with relevant Departments, including my own, to produce a concrete plan for implementation of the Youth Guarantee in Ireland, for consideration by the Government before being transmitted to the European Commission by the end of the year. My Department is also keen to support young entrepreneurs and, in this context, current initiatives such as Enterprise Ireland's Competitive Start Fund and New Frontiers Programme, along with the Microenterprise Loan Fund, all contribute to supporting young entrepreneurs.

More than 48,000 jobs will be created in 2014 through supports from my Department as a result of the measures announced in this week's Budget. Some of the specific measures announced include:

- A package of new initiatives to support start-ups and growing businesses, including Start Your Own Business Scheme – a 2-year income tax exemption for long-term unemployed people who start their own business,

- €3.5million in additional funding for CEBs/LEOs, and
- Continued provision for a total of over €2billion in non-bank credit schemes for business.

Earlier this year, I established the Entrepreneurs Forum. I am pleased that so many of the ideas that they have championed have also been addressed in the Budget. The Government will also publish a Policy Statement on Entrepreneurship, including youth entrepreneurship, this year.

In relation to the number of jobs created in Co Kerry, and the areas they have been created in, I refer the Deputy to my reply of 10 October 2013 to Dáil Question No. 93 (Reference No: 42799/13), tabled by him.

Social Insurance Refunds

100. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if in the case of the deduction at source of PRSI contributions by an employer in the public or the private sector where such deductions were not in order due to age or other regulation, if full refund of such deductions may be made retrospectively in line with the entitlement of the Revenue Commissioners to retrospectively apply tax liability for previous years without restriction; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44065/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): A four year limit on the return of PRSI contributions was introduced in the Social Welfare and Pensions (No. 2) Act 2009 and has been in effect since 1 January 2010. The time limit governing the refund of PRSI contributions is in line with the arrangements of the Revenue Commissioners governing the refund of tax.

Rent Supplement Scheme Applications

101. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will confirm receipt of an application form for rent supplement in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare and all supporting documentation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43889/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The customer was awarded her full entitlement to rent supplement and arrears on 9 October based on her household composition and circumstances.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Eligibility

102. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Social Protection if appendix 8 of the medical eligibility guidelines for domiciliary care allowance, on medical conditions, is still in force; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43892/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The review of the Domiciliary Care Allowance scheme (DCA), which was published in April 2013, makes a number of recommendations in relation to the medical eligibility guidelines pertaining to the scheme. Amongst these recommendations is the deletion of the advisory list of conditions more likely or less likely to be considered to qualify a child for DCA, (Appendix 8). In practice, the section of the guidelines referred to, is no longer referred to by medical assessors as part of the assessment

process and has not been for some time.

The necessary changes to implement the medical eligibility guidelines and recommendations have been drafted and will be implemented after the implementation group, which has been established to action the recommendations in the report, has finalised arrangements. This work is progressing well and it is hoped to have the recommendations implemented in the near future.

Rent Supplement Scheme Expenditure

103. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the total annual costs of rent support in each of the past three years to date; the extent to which she has examined the possibility of replacing such a process with permanent housing of a traditional nature; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43893/13]

106. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the extent to which her Department has monitored sharp increases in rent, which are affecting those on rent support; if she has in mind any provision to address the issue in view of the fact that many persons on rent support are being forced to vacate their accommodation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43896/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 103 and 106 together.

The purpose of the rent supplement scheme is to provide short-term support to eligible people living in private rented accommodation whose means are insufficient to meet their accommodation costs and who do not have accommodation available to them from any other source. There are approximately 82,000 rent supplement recipients of whom over 51,000 are in receipt for over 18 months. The Government has provided over €403 million for the scheme in 2013. Expenditure on rent supplement for the last 3 years is provided in the following tabular statement.

New revised rent limits came into force on 17 June 2013. The new rent limits were determined following an extensive review of the private rental market which showed rising rents for urban centres, particularly Dublin and Galway, and reduction in rents for the majority of counties. The new limits continue to ensure that value for money is achieved while, at the same time, people on rent supplement are not priced out of the market for private rented accommodation. The Department currently funds approximately 30% of the total supply of private rented sector properties so it is essential that the rent limits are kept under review and do not distort the natural supply and demand conditions that prevail. Officials in the Department continue to examine the impact of the new rent limits on those who claim rent supplement and ensure that their accommodation needs are met.

The Department's strategic policy direction is to return rent supplement to its original purpose of a short term income support. In July 2013 the Government approved the introduction of the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP). Under HAP, responsibility for recipients of rent supplement with a long-term housing need will transfer from the Department of Social Protection to local authorities. Officials in the Department of Social protection are working with those in the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government, who are leading the project, in developing proposals to give effect to this transfer. Under HAP, customers with assessments of a long term housing need who would otherwise receive rent supplement will be taken directly into HAP.

This summer, DECLG undertook a Business Processing Design exercise to determine the business processes required to support the implementation of HAP roll out. This exercise will assist DECLG in the drafting of the necessary legislation and feed into the development of implementation plans and the necessary IT infrastructure to support the roll-out of the new scheme in selected test authorities. The Department is advised that following the enactment of the relevant legislation, a HAP testing phase will be carried out in the selected local authorities in 2014 with full roll out of the scheme to follow once the test phase is complete.

Rent Supplement Expenditure: 2010 to 2012

Year	Cost €000
2010	516,500
2011	502,700
2012	422,500

Social Welfare Appeals Waiting Times

104. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the average waiting period for decision in respect of disability allowance on appeal; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43894/13]

107. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the average time taken to deal with appeals in respect of invalidity pension; the extent to which the waiting period has fluctuated in each of the past three years to date; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43897/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 104 and 107 together.

I am advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that the current average time taken to process disability allowance appeals decided by summary decision is 31.5 weeks and 40 weeks for those requiring an oral hearing. The current average time taken to process invalidity pension appeals decided by summary decision is 35.1 weeks and 41.7 weeks for those requiring an oral hearing. Processing times of invalidity pension appeals from 2010 to 2012 and to date in 2013 are listed in the following table.

There has been a rapid and sustained increase in the number of appeals received in the Social Welfare Appeals Office since 2009 which has placed extraordinary pressure on the office. Up to 2009, the average number of appeals received was 15,000 per annum whereas in 2012, the office received 35,484 appeals. In order to manage this increasing workload, significant resources and efforts have been put into reducing backlogs and improving appeals processing times for appellants, including the assignment of 15 additional Appeals Officers, in addition to 10 former Community Welfare Service Appeals Officers who joined the appeals office in 2011, bringing the total number of serving Appeals Officers to 41; reviewing and improving business processes; and implementing a new operating model within the appeals office.

In addition, a major programme of process redesign and modernisation is under way in the Department in relation to many of its scheme areas, aimed at reducing backlogs and reducing the time taken by the Department to respond to requests from the appeals office for submissions in relation to appeals. These measures have led to improvements in processing times and a significant increase in the number of appeals finalised from 17,787 in 2009 to 32,558 in 2012. The Chief Appeals Officer expects to finalise 6,000 more cases in 2013 than in 2012. Good progress is also now being made in reducing the number of appeals on hand from 20,414 at 1

January 2013 to 16,420 at 14 October 2013.

The average waiting time for appeals peaked in 2011 when the average time for an oral hearing was 52.5 weeks and for a summary decision was 25.1 weeks. In 2012 these times improved by 10.3 weeks when the average time for an oral hearing dropped to 39.5 weeks while the time for a summary decision increased slightly to 27.8 weeks. This improvement has continued with the average processing time up to September 2013 reducing to 35.2 weeks for an oral hearing and 26.7 weeks for a summary decision. A similar trend is reflected in processing times for invalidity pension appeals. In 2010 the average processing time for an invalidity pension oral hearing was 59.7 weeks while a decision requiring a summary decision took an average of 40 weeks. This had improved to 48.7 and 38.8 weeks respectively in 2012 and has further improved (up to September 2013) to 41.7 and 35.1 weeks respectively.

These processing times are calculated from the registration date of the appeal to the date of its finalisation. They include all activities during this period including time spent awaiting any clarification from the appellant, time in the Department for comments by the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal put forward by the appellant, and any further investigation, examination or assessment by the Department's Inspectors and Medical Assessors that is deemed necessary. A considerable period of time is added to the process when an oral hearing is required because of the logistics involved in this process. While this process carries an inherent delay in terms of finalising an appeal, it also crystallises the flexibility and accessibility of the appeals system.

By its nature and because it is a quasi-judicial function, the processing of appeals takes time and reflects the fact that, by definition, the appeal process cannot be a quick one.

Processing times for Invalidity Pension Appeals 2010-2013 (to 30/9/2013)

-	Average processing times (weeks) Summary Decisions	Average processing times (weeks) Oral Hearings
2010	40.0	59.7
2011	36.4	58.9
2012	38.8	48.7
2013 (to 30/9/2013)	35.1	41.7

State Pension (Non-Contributory) Applications

105. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the total number of applications for non-contributory old age pension received in each of the past two years to date; the number approved, refused and-or pending; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43895/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I would like in the first instance to refer the Deputy to the *Annual Social Welfare Services Statistical Information Report, 2012* which provides most of the information requested by him and is available on www.welfare.ie. For convenience, I have set it out in the following tabular statement.

State pension (non-contributory)	2011	2012	2013 – to date
Registered	7,344	9,035	7,409
Awarded	5,730	7,243	5,550
Rejected	1,998	2,453	1,715

Withdrawn	1,009	1,149	739
Claims Cleared	8,737	10,845	8,004
Pending	1,869	1,432	2,084

Question No. 106 answered with Question No. 103.

Question No. 107 answered with Question No. 104.

Mortgage Interest Supplement Payments

108. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the total number of applicants currently in receipt of mortgage interest supplement; the number of cases pending; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43898/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): There are currently some 11,000 people in receipt of mortgage interest supplement for which the Government has provided almost €42 million in 2013. Statistics are not available on the number of applications for mortgage interest supplement that are currently pending.

Social Welfare Schemes

109. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the total number of community training or employment related schemes currently available; the number of persons in such places at present; the extent to which she expects to maintain the maximum level of such places; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43899/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The information requested is contained in the following tables.

Participants as at 30 September 2013

Programme	Participants	Supervisors	Total
CE	21,560	1,378	22,938
JI	1,077	40	1,117
RSS	2,584	130	2,714
Tús	6,752	344	7,096
CSP	1,764	308	2,072
Gateway	-	-	-
Total	33,737	2,200	35,937

Target participant numbers end 2014

Programme	Total
CE	25,300
JI	1,100
RSS	2,730
Tús	7,500
CSP	2,800

Gateway	3,000
Total	42,430

There were approximately 36,000 participants on Employment Schemes at the end of September 2013. The Department has no plans to reduce this level of provision at this point in time. I can assure the Deputy that I will maintain the maximum number possible on the Department's Training and Community Schemes.

Youth Unemployment Measures

110. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the extent to which youth unemployment continues to be specifically targeted by way of ensuring the availability of maximum number of training places, internships, apprenticeships or temporary employment opportunities; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43901/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Government is implementing a number of programmes to assist young unemployed persons and keep young jobseekers close to the labour market. There are five main approaches being taken to tackle youth unemployment: education, training, job search assistance/guidance, work experience, and encouraging job creation. These actions range across a number of Departments and Agencies and include:

- The Youthreach programme providing 6,000 integrated education, training and work experience for early school leavers without any qualifications or vocational training who are between 15 and 20 years of age;

- The Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme scheme, which provides a range of courses to meet the education and training needs of unemployed people over 21 years of age, particularly focusing upon early school leavers;

- The Back to Education Allowance scheme run by the Department of Social Protection provides income maintenance for unemployed people returning to further or higher education. Over 6,500 young people participated on this scheme in the last academic year;

- Approximately 12,000 persons aged under 25 completed a training course with FÁS in 2012. This excludes apprenticeships and evening courses;

- This year MOMENTUM, a scheme for education and training interventions, which is part of the Government's Action Plan for Jobs initiative, is currently being rolled out by the Department of Education. MOMENTUM will support the provision of free education and training projects to allow 6,500 long term jobseekers to gain skills and to access work opportunities in identified growing sectors. Over 1,250 of these places are assigned specifically for under 25s;

- The JobBridge National Internship Scheme is focused on providing work experience to young people with the total number of placements of young people on JobBridge during 2012 at 2,700; and

- Long-term unemployed youth will also benefit from the JobsPlus initiative which is designed to encourage employers to recruit long-term unemployed people. Under this scheme the State will pay circa €1 of every €4 it costs the employer to recruit a person from the Live Register.

With regards to the apprenticeship system, the allocation of apprenticeships is essentially driven by employer demand. The apprenticeship system is currently is being reviewed by a

Review Group appointed by the Minister of Education. The Review Group will examine how the apprenticeship system can place a greater focus on work-based learning and closer align to the needs of the Irish labour market. In addition to current initiatives, policies to increase youth employment will be supplemented by additional measures under the Youth Guarantee which will be rolled out from 2014.

JobsPlus Scheme

111. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the uptake to date under the JobsPlus scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43902/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): JobsPlus was launched on 8th July 2013. This is a new incentive to encourage employers to recruit and employ persons who have been unemployed for long periods. It replaced this Department's Employer Job PRSI Incentive Scheme and the Revenue Job Assist Scheme managed by the Revenue Commissioners. Subject to meeting the eligibility criteria and creating a full-time position, employers will receive a direct monthly cash incentive over two years if the person they hire has been unemployed for a prolonged period. The level of payment is higher where a person who has been unemployed for a longer period is recruited and retained.

The Department had received applications from 2,639 jobseekers at the close of business on the 11th October 2013. Of these, 2,028 applications have been deemed eligible with 1,301 qualifying on the basis of being 24 months unemployed and, therefore, attracting a payment to an employer of €10,000 paid over two years. The remaining 727 applications are eligible for a payment of €7,500 over two years, having been unemployed for between 12 and 24 months. The Department has processed applications from 1,393 employers at the 11th October. Of these 585 have been matched with eligible jobseekers and I expect grant payments to commence in respect of these 520 of these cases before the end of the month. Work is on-going in matching the remaining eligible employers with jobseekers. Further information regarding the scheme can be found at www.jobsplus.ie.

Social Welfare Benefits

112. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the extent to which means-tested social welfare payments remain available to the previously self-employed scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43903/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I assume the Deputy's Question refers to access to jobseeker allowance for people previously engaged in self-employment. A self-employed person may apply for jobseeker's allowance if their business ceases or their income reduces to a low level due a lack of demand for services. Jobseekers allowance is a means tested payment and income from self-employment activity is assessed by reference to the estimated net profit from the business concerned over the coming 12 months. It is recognised that the present downturn in the economy is having a significant impact on many self-employed persons and the consequent reduction in income and activity levels is reflected in any assessment of means from self-employment.

Where it is not possible to estimate income for the coming 12 months, the income for the most recent 12 month period is generally taken as a guide, allowing for any known changes in circumstances which are likely to have a significant effect on income. Accordingly, account is taken of the potential for significant upward or downward variations in income from one year

to the next. For example, if a self-employed person lost a contract and was unlikely to find a substitute contract in the coming year, this would be factored into the estimate of future income. At present there are over 11,000 people in receipt of a jobseeker's allowance payment who are also classified as self-employed, although the current level of engagement in business would vary greatly among this group.

Unemployment Levels

113. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of persons currently on the live register who have remained unemployed for up to two years and for longer periods; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43904/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): As of the end of September 2013 there were 408,670 people on the live register. The following is a breakdown by scheme and duration of this number for the Deputy's information.

Live Register end of September, 2013

-	Less than 2 years	2 Years and over	Total
Jobseeker's Allowance	190,653	121,739	312,392
Jobseeker's Benefit	61,535	179	61,714
Credits Only	18,694	15,870	34,564
Total	270,882	137,788	408,670

State Pensions Reform

114. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Social Protection the position for persons who retire from work at the age of 65 during the 2014 calendar year in terms of their entitlement to a State pension; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43908/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Increasing State pension age and the abolition of the State pension (transition) are steps that have been taken to ensure the sustainability of pensions into the future. The decision to reform State pension was taken in the context of changing demographics and the fact that people are living longer and healthier lives. The Social Welfare and Pensions Act, 2011 provides that State pension age will be increased gradually to 68 years. This will begin in 2014 when State pension (transition) ceases and State pension age is standardised for all at 66 years. The State pension age will be further increased to 67 years in 2021 and to 68 years in 2028.

It should be noted that until the 1970s, the standard age for receipt of State pension was 70 years of age. This applied at a time when longevity was much lower and working patterns were more likely to be physically demanding. State pension (transition) was introduced in 1970 when it was known as the retirement pension and was designed to bridge the gap between the standard social welfare pension age, which at that time was 70 years of age, and retirement age. Over time, the age for State pension contributory was reduced to 66 years.

In terms of social welfare supports available to those at age 65 who are unable to remain in the workforce, all short term schemes are payable to 66 years. The main social welfare payment available to those who leave employment before State pension age is jobseeker's benefit. Persons who qualify for a jobseeker's benefit who are aged between 65 and 66 years are gener-

ally entitled to receive payment up to the date on which they reach pensionable age (66 years). Where a person does not meet the qualifying conditions for insurance based schemes, assistance schemes may be available to them provided they meet the qualifying conditions for these schemes. Further consideration is being given to the position of those exiting the workforce before pension age.

Question No. 115 withdrawn.

Free Travel Scheme Eligibility

116. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Social Protection the entitlement to avail of the free travel scheme for civil servants who retired early on health grounds who are on Civil Service pension only and who would be in receipt of invalidity pension but for the fact that they are civil servants; if she will outline such an individual's current entitlement to the free travel scheme; if she proposes to introduce an equivalent ruling allowing entitlement to proven cases who were forced to retire on health grounds; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43911/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): There are currently in excess of 770,000 customers eligible for free travel and when spousal and companion passes are taken into account, there are over 1.2 million customers with some free travel eligibility. Expenditure on this scheme was frozen at 2010 levels by the previous Government. The available expenditure for the free travel scheme in 2013 is €77 million.

The free travel scheme is currently available to all people living in the State aged 66 years or over, to carers and to customers under 66 who are in receipt of certain disability type payments. The scheme permits customers to travel for free on most CIE public transport services, LUAS and a range of services offered by up to 90 private operators in various parts of the country.

Customers aged under 66 years must be in receipt of a qualifying payment from my Department in order to qualify for a free travel pass. Civil servants recruited before 1995 make a reduced PRSI contribution and do not have an entitlement to invalidity pension. I have no plans to change the current qualifying criteria for the scheme.

Jobseeker's Allowance Eligibility

117. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will clarify the issue of entitlement or qualification on means testing basis to jobseeker's allowance for the self-employed persons; if she will clarify if some system equivalent to family income supplement may be devised; if part-payment of allowance may be given while they are still earning up to the means testing limit; if her attention has been drawn to some commentary that some officials in the Dublin area are advising Department clients to end their self-employment in order to qualify for assistance as many self-employed wish to continue working while earning an income below the means testing limit and who still wish to remain in the workforce; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43915/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Self-employed persons are liable for pay related social insurance (PRSI) at a rate of 4%, which entitles them to access long-term benefits such as state pension (contributory) and widow's, widower's or surviving civil partner's pension (contributory). This compares to employees in respect of whom a combined 14.75% rate, under full-rate PRSI Class A, is paid giving entitlement to the full range of social

insurance benefits.

In general, where persons do not qualify for social insurance benefits they may claim means tested social assistance payments. For example, any person of working age who does not qualify for jobseeker's benefit may claim means tested jobseeker's allowance. Subject to means and other qualifying conditions, self-employed persons may claim jobseeker's allowance if their business ceases or there is reduced demand for their services. Typically over 80% of jobseeker's allowance claims from self-employed persons have been awarded over recent years.

Where a person or their spouse engages in self-employment, income from that employment is assessable as means which will typically reduce the amount of jobseeker's allowance payable. While social welfare local offices provide advice to customers in relation to their welfare entitlements it is not the policy of the Department to advise claimants or their dependants to give up employment.

It may also be noted that while family income supplement is not available to self-employed persons the Advisory Group on Tax and Social Welfare, which has already reported to me on a number of important policy areas, is now looking at a range of issues in relation to working age supports. This work includes consideration of family income supplement.

Invalidity Pension Appeals

118. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for Social Protection the position regarding an appeal for invalidity pension in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Cork; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43938/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was referred to an Appeals Officer on 11th October 2013, who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

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

Disability Allowance Appeals

119. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a decision on a disability allowance appeal will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Clare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43952/13]

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.

Jobseeker's Allowance Applications

120. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection when payment will be restored in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Dublin; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43972/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): An application for jobseeker's allowance in the case of the person concerned has been awarded. The first payment will be available for collection by the person concerned on Thursday 17 October at the full personal rate. The spouse of the person concerned can collect a separate payment for herself as an adult dependent on this claim and for five qualified children on the same date.

Child Benefit Payments

121. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection when it is expected that child benefit including any arrears will be paid in full in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43974/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Child benefit is in payment to the person concerned for her four children.

Child benefit was awarded in February 2008 in respect of her two older children, payable from November 2007, the month she was granted permission to remain in Ireland. Child benefit was awarded for her 2 younger children from the month after they were born.

According to the records of the Department there are no outstanding payments or arrears due to the person concerned.

Mortgage Interest Relief Application

122. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection when mortgage interest relief will be restored in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43975/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): A mortgage interest supplement application from the person concerned was refused in September 2013. It is open to the person concerned to appeal this decision to the Social Welfare Appeals Office.

Social Welfare Benefits Eligibility

123. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if partial one-parent family allowance or other support payment is available in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43976/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): According to the records of this Department the person concerned is currently in receipt of an invalidity pension. There is no recent record of an application for a one parent family payment from the person concerned. There is no provision within the current regulations to award a one parent family payment to a person who is in receipt of an invalidity pension.

Question No. 124 withdrawn.

Disability Allowance Appeals

125. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Social Protection when payment of a disability allowance appeal will issue in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Clare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43987/13]

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.

Question No. 126 withdrawn.

Supplementary Welfare Allowance Eligibility

127. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if basic supplementary welfare allowance is payable in the case of persons (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43999/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): There is no record of an application for basic supplementary welfare allowance in respect of the persons concerned. However, they were in receipt of mortgage interest supplement payment which has been suspended pending receipt of information requested on 23 September 2013. The Department cannot make a decision on entitlement with regard to this until this information is provided.

Invalidity Pension Appeals

128. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Social Protection the position regarding an invalidity pension appeal in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath, if same will be expedited; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44005/13]

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 July 2013. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant papers and comments by or on behalf of the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought from the Department of Social Protection. These papers were received in the Social Welfare Appeals Office on 3 October 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.

Invalidity Pension Appeals

129. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Social Protection the position regarding an invalidity pension appeal in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath, if same will be expedited; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44008/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was referred to an Appeals Officer on 2 October 2013, who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing. The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

Questions Nos. 130 and 131 withdrawn.

Question No. 132 answered with Question No. 16.

Carer's Allowance Eligibility

133. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will respond to correspondence regarding a carer's allowance in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Clare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44038/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): At the outset, I wish to acknowledge the valuable contribution that people caring for members of their own family are making to society - it was for that reason that the Government last year adopted the National Carers' Strategy. The Department is fully committed to ensuring that carers can access benefits advice as early as possible when their caring role begins and to improving the availability of information on the supports available.

In this context, advice is available from the Department's local office network and website, Citizen Information Centres and from the various organisations representing carers. In relation to the role generally of health care personnel in this area, I would point out that, as part of the National Carers' Strategy, the HSE has given a commitment to promoting more proactive approaches to the identification of carers and to addressing their needs among staff and organisations that are likely to encounter individuals in caring situations (e.g. health and personal social service providers, and particularly primary care team members, community and education professionals).

Domiciliary Care Allowance Appeals

134. **Deputy Heather Humphreys** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a person (details supplied) in County Cavan will receive a decision on their domiciliary care allowance appeal; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44047/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that the appeal from the person concerned was referred to an Appeals Officer who has decided to convene an oral hearing in this case. Every effort will be made to hear the case as quickly as possible and the appellant will be informed when arrangements for the oral hearing have been made. The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals

against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

Question No. 135 withdrawn.

Disability Allowance Appeals

136. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Social Protection the position regarding a disability allowance appeal in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44054/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was referred to an Appeals Officer on 3rd October 2013, who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

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

Question No. 137 withdrawn.

Invalidity Pension Appeals

138. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will examine an invalidity appeal in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44075/13]

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 August 2013. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant papers and comments by or on behalf of the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought from the Department of Social Protection. These papers have been received in the Social Welfare Appeals Office and the case will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

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

Social Welfare Benefits

139. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection the position regarding State payments (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44089/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): My Department provides a range of supports to people as contingencies arise. When a death occurs, provision is made to continue the payment of the person's benefit to the spouse, civil partner or cohabitant.

In the case of a separated person, and where there is no legal divorce in place, the person

to whom the payment may be made is the spouse. There is no provision to make after death payments to children of the deceased. I have no plans to provide for changes to this practice.

Carer's Allowance Appeals

140. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Social Protection if an application for carer's allowance now under appeal will be expedited and approved in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny. [44091/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned has been 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.

Land Ownership

141. **Deputy Luke 'Ming' Flanagan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the number of hectares of raised bog owned by the State and semi-State bodies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44013/13]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan): The ownership of land in State or semi-State ownership is a matter for each public body concerned. In that regard, ownership details will not necessarily classify land in accordance with particular habitat types.

In the case of protected raised bogs my Department is currently working with the Property Registration Authority of Ireland to improve the level of information available on the ownership of lands generally within sites nominated for designation as raised bog Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and those designated as raised bog Natural Heritage Areas. This work is being carried out in the context of the National Raised Bog SAC Management Plan and the review of raised bog Natural Heritage Areas.

Hare Coursing

142. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if he will consider removing the text which states that coursing leads to some mortality each year but management of coursing reserves has also been shown to be beneficial to hares leading to higher hare densities, as this text is misleading and inaccurate without substantial evidence to support the claim; the evidence used to support this claim; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44076/13]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan): The text referred to in the NPWS Report '*Status of EU Protected Habitats and Species in Ireland*' is from a paper entitled 'Integrating field sports, hare population management and conservation' (Reid et al 2010). The paper in question examined hare densities within coursing preserves and compared them to the wider countryside. It concluded that the mean density of hares within

these preserves was three times higher than mean densities throughout the wider countryside, even allowing for variations in density in different habitats.

Overall, the evidence suggests that the impact of coursing on the conservation status of hares nationally is negligible and there may in fact be direct and indirect benefits for hare populations, such as in the control of foxes.

The background paper referenced in the NPWS report provides a reasoned analysis of the matter and the text referred to by the Deputy is considered to be valid.

Sale of State Assets

143. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the percentage of wind farms and wind farm assets of Bord Gáis it is envisaged they will sell; the number of wind farms this amounts to; and if he will supply a list of locations. [43918/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): In February 2012 the Government agreed to sell the competitive energy business of Bord Gáis Éireann (BGE), namely Bord Gáis Energy. Bord Gáis Energy comprises the following businesses:

- A leading energy supply business in Ireland, servicing over 700,000 customers in the gas and electricity markets,
- A 445 MW gas fired power station at Whitegate in Co. Cork,
- A large scale portfolio of onshore wind assets, and
- Firmus energy, a growing energy supply and distribution business in Northern Ireland.

The sale of Bord Gáis Energy comprises the entire portfolio of BGÉ onshore wind assets.

In December 2009, BGÉ completed the acquisition of SWS Natural Resources Holdings Limited, together with its subsidiaries and joint ventures. SWS had a total installed capacity of 178 MW, of which 5MW was in Northern Ireland. At the time, SWS had wind generation assets in development with a projected additional capacity of 460 MW (311 MW in Ireland and 149 MW in Northern Ireland). Since the acquisition of SWS, Bord Gáis Energy has made considerable investment in the development of its windfarm portfolio with the development of a number of significant projects.

Bord Gáis Energy is a key player within the Irish wind energy market with 15% of the installed wind capacity in Ireland at present and an operational capacity of 234MW. It owns and operates 135 turbines on 13 wind farms in eight counties - Kerry, Cork, Limerick, Clare, Tipperary, Kilkenny, Donegal and Tyrone. The Bord Gáis Energy website includes an interactive map with information about the individual wind farms.

Broadband Services Provision

144. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources his plans to upgrade the broadband capability of an area (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43924/13]

146. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the position regarding the provision on broadband in an area (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43986/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): I propose to take Questions Nos. 144 and 146 together.

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-regulated 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 County Kildare, 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). The Scheme offers a basic broadband service, in line with EU State aid clearance, to fixed residences and fixed businesses in the designated NBS Electoral Divisions. The areas of Mullaghmast, Ballitore, Narraghmore, Calverstown and Kilmeade, referred to in the Deputy's questions, are serviced under the NBS.

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 County Kildare. 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, and maximise the benefits of, a digitally enabled economy and society.

Alternative Energy Projects

145. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the number of wind turbines it will take to fulfill his Memorandum of Understanding in view of the fact that a newspaper (details supplied) reported that the UK will save seven billion sterling by not having to build offshore wind farms and that Ireland is planning to export approximately €2.5 billion worth of electricity annually; if he has carried out a cost benefit analysis and if that analysis has taken into account the well being of the persons here who are to be forced to live with the pylons and turbines; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43930/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): In January of this year the UK Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change Mr. Ed Davey MP and I signed a Memorandum of Understanding on energy cooperation. That Memorandum sent a strong signal of our shared interest in developing the opportunity to export green electricity from Ireland to Britain and will result in completion of consideration of how Irish renewable energy resources, onshore and offshore, might be developed to the mutual benefit of both countries. An agreed programme of work to this end is underway with the ambition to settle on an Inter-Governmental Agreement in early 2014. A key objective, from an Irish Government perspective, is to realise the potential for investment, jobs and growth. The amount of energy to be procured by the UK and the mechanisms for sharing the resultant economic benefits, including an appropriate return to the Exchequer, are among the matters to be addressed ahead of signing any Inter-Governmental Agreement.

One of the key requirements for proposals of a significant scale for wind energy export will be the achievement of the necessary planning consents in Ireland. Planning permission for major renewable energy projects of significant scale are determined by An Bord Pleanála (ABP). In order to facilitate decisions by ABP on projects specifically for export, a clear national planning policy framework is essential and I have asked my Department to prepare such a framework. The policy framework will provide the opportunity to integrate relevant EU Directive requirements (including Strategic Environmental Assessment and Appropriate Assessment), trans-boundary dimensions and stakeholder participation within the context of a national framework.

The outcome will be a high level development framework taking its lead from the Inter-Governmental Agreement, EU Directive requirements and relevant national, regional and local planning policy considerations in conjunction with wider policies, objectives and requirements. It will incorporate a vision and strategy coupled with technical parameters and a spatial element.

The development of the framework will be progressed by my Department over the next year or so and will provide confidence and certainty for all stakeholders through an open, fair, balanced and consultative process. It is intended to commence public consultation in the coming weeks by formally inviting all interested parties and members of the public to make written submissions on the export project which will be taken into consideration in preparing the framework. Details on this will be provided through a new dedicated section on my Department's website, exclusive to the project, and which will be updated as the project progresses.

In addition, the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, in conjunction with my Department and the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland, is undertaking a review of the Wind Energy Guidelines which will address the key issues of noise (including separation distance) and shadow flicker. Draft guidelines will be published for public consultation by end-November 2013 with a view to finalising guidelines by mid-2014. The revised guidelines will apply to all wind farm development in Ireland.

Question No. 146 answered with Question No. 144.

National Postcode System Implementation

147. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the reason the Loc8 postcode system which was developed after ten years, consultants reports, and three years of research costing €1million is not being used for the new postcode system even though it is capable of doing everything that Capita have been asked to devise. [44030/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): On 8 October I announced the Government had approved, subject to contract, the launch of a national postcode system in 2015.

Subject to contract, the preferred bidder will design and run the postcode under license for an initial ten year period extendable at the discretion of the Minister for Communications by a further five years.

The new postcode system will provide a unique code to every postal address in Ireland, including individual apartments.

The Government decision followed the conclusion of a public procurement and tender evaluation process which was conducted by my Department. The process identified a consortium headed by Capita as the preferred bidder. The bid was appropriately selected on the basis of the criteria developed and used as part of that procurement.

Renewable Energy Feed in Tariff Scheme Expenditure

148. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will provide a breakdown for the years 2010-11, 2011-12, 2012-13, 2013-14 on the expenditure under the refit programme which was used to subsidise wind turbine energy projects; if he will provide a county breakdown of the allocations; the number of projects in each county; together with details of the way the funding is allocated to each project (%); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44046/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): The primary support mechanisms for renewable energy, including wind farms, are the Alternative Energy Requirement (AER) schemes and the Renewable Energy Feed-In-Tariff (REFIT) schemes. These schemes were introduced to incentivise the development of the renewable electricity generation capacity necessary to allow Ireland to meet its target of 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 from renewable sources by 2020.

The estimates for how much subsidy is funded by way of the Public Service Obligation (PSO) levy each year since 2010-11 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 REFIT 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 REFIT schemes for

each technology supported. The following table presents the costs for REFIT since 2010-11:

Year	REFIT
	€m
2013/14	51.1 (projected)
2012/13	47.5
2011/12	35.8
2010/11	29.7

While a county by county breakdown of allocations under REFIT is not available, the following table sets out the number of REFIT wind energy projects by county:

County	No. of projects
Cavan	4
Clare	3
Cork	21
Donegal	26
Dublin	1
Galway	3
Kerry	27
Kildare	0
Kilkenny	5
Laois	1
Leitrim	5
Limerick	13
Louth	1
Mayo	9
Meath	1
Monaghan	1
Offaly	3
Roscommon	4
Sligo	3
Tipperary	22
Waterford	4
Westmeath	1
Wexford	12
Wicklow	2

REFIT schemes are designed to provide renewable electricity generators with the certainty required to finance their projects. Based around Power Purchase Agreements between generators and electricity suppliers, REFIT schemes guarantee a minimum floor price for each unit of electricity exported to the grid over a defined period. Costs associated with the REFIT schemes are payable from the PSO fund, which is raised by a levy on all electricity consumers. Allocations from the PSO fund are made by the CER on the basis of a minimum price per kilowatt hour for the amount of electricity exported to the grid by each REFIT project for the duration of a scheme.

149. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will intervene in the level of service that a company is offering to persons (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44085/13]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte): I refer to the reply to Question No. 66 of 16 October 2013 on the same matter. The position is unchanged.

Property Taxation Exemptions

150. **Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if an unfinished housing estate (details supplied) in County Tipperary which has been granted waivers and exemptions are liable for property tax; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43943/13]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The Local Government (Household Charge) Act 2011 and the Local Government (Household Charge) Regulations provide the legislative basis for the household charge. The regulations covering the application of the charge included a number of exemptions and waivers. One of the waivers applied to certain unfinished estates on a categorisation basis. Unfinished housing developments were divided into four categories as follows:

Category one, where the development was still being actively completed by the developer, or where no serious public safety issues existed;

Category two, where a receiver had been appointed;

Category three, where a receiver had not been appointed and the developer has still in place but effectively inactive; and

Category four, where the development had been effectively abandoned and posed serious problems for residents.

The household charge waiver applied to estates in categories three and four and as the Riveroaks Estate in Riverstown, was deemed to fall into category 3 it qualifies for the waiver.

An exemption from the local property tax applies to developments listed in the schedule to the Finance (Local Property Tax) Regulations 2013. The list of unfinished housing developments eligible for the exemption was compiled by local authorities utilising the categorisation employed for the purposes of the National Housing Survey 2012. The survey was carried out over the course of summer 2012 by my Department in conjunction with local authorities and the Housing Agency.

The categorisation methodology for the survey was different to that which was used in 2011 and which provided the basis for the waiver from the household charge. The earlier categorisation related largely to the level of on-site activity at the time the 2011 survey was carried out and had less to do with the physical character of a development. The 2012 survey was based purely and objectively on the actual state of completion of a development.

Only developments that were deemed by local authorities to be in a “seriously problematic condition”, regardless of whether a developer was on or off site, were included in the LPT regulations. As the Riveroaks Estate in Riverstown, was considered to satisfy this criterion, it has been exempted from the local property tax for 2013.

Commercial Rates Valuation Process

151. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide in tabular form the net effect of the commercial rates re-valuation on each local authority; if compensation will be given to local authorities who lose income as a result of the revaluation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43920/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): Local authorities are under a statutory obligation to levy rates on any property used for commercial purposes in accordance with the details entered in the valuation lists prepared by the independent Commissioner of Valuation under the Valuation Act 2001. The levying and collection of rates are matters for each individual local authority. The annual rate on valuation (ARV), which is applied to the valuation of each property, determined by the Valuation Office, to obtain the amount payable in rates, is decided by the elected members of each local authority in the annual budget and its determination is a reserved function. The Commissioner of Valuation, who has sole responsibility for all valuation matters, is conducting a programme of revaluation of all commercial and industrial properties throughout the State on a county by county basis. In a revaluation the entire commercial valuation list for a local authority is brought up-to-date by reference to values at a specific valuation date and the entire list is published on one date (usually 31 December) and comes into effect for rating purposes on 1 January the following year.

The essential purpose of a revaluation is to redistribute the burden of rates more equitably in line with relative changes in valuations across different classes of properties or individual properties within particular classes or uses. Revaluation results in more consistent and up-to-date valuations for rating purposes and provides a more equitable distribution of valuations across those liable to pay rates.

Under Section 8 of the Local Government (Business Improvement Districts) Act 2006 the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, having obtained the consent of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, can make an order directing a rating authority to limit the overall amount of income it could raise through rates in the year following a revaluation to the total amount of rates liable to be paid to it in the previous year, plus buoyancy (arising from valuations determined in the year of a revaluation of newly constructed property), adjusted for inflation as measured by the CPI.

Rate limitation orders have been made in each of the local authorities to have undergone a revaluation to date, namely, South Dublin, Fingal and Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Councils.

Water and Sewerage Schemes Status

152. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the position regarding a project (details supplied) in County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43951/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): The Water Services Investment Programme 2010 – 2013 provides for the development of a comprehensive range of new water services infrastructure in County Clare. Consideration was given, as part of the review of the Programme in 2011, to any newly emerging priority contracts and schemes submitted by local authorities for addition to the Programme, in line with the original priorities set out for the Programme for this cycle of investment. The Programme now includes contracts under construction and to commence to the value of almost €42 million

in County Clare during the period of the Programme.

The Programme prioritises projects that target environmental compliance issues and support economic and employment growth. A key input to the development of the Programme was the assessment of needs prepared by local authorities, including Clare County Council, in response to my Department's request to authorities in 2009 to review and prioritise their proposals for new capital works in their areas. These were subsequently appraised in my Department in the context of the funds available and key criteria that complemented those used by the authorities. Inevitably, through this process, certain projects that had been proposed had to give way to others that were more strategically important at that time.

The Carrigaholt Sewerage Scheme was not amongst the priority contracts and schemes selected for inclusion in the current Programme. While Clare County Council submitted a proposal to have the Carrigaholt Sewerage Scheme included in the current programme, as part of the review process in 2011, there had been no change in circumstances since 2009 such as to alter the priority attached to the scheme. Consequently it was not possible to include the Carrigaholt Sewerage Scheme in the current Programme.

However, Clare County Council may consider submitting a proposal in respect of group sewerage scheme grants when submissions are requested for 2014.

Citizenship Applications

153. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will clarify the issue of the types and costs of the various Irish nationality certificates awarded; if the costs vary depending on whether the client is an EU citizen, other than EU national, an asylum grantee and so on; if cost to client in each case can be outlined; if cost in all cases is fully borne by the applicant and specifically say why cost to an EU citizen married to an Irish citizen is regarded as expensive considering that the administrative cost of such an application and the background examination into it would be less than other cases; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43913/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The Irish Nationality and Citizenship Regulations 2011, sets out the prescribed fees to be paid by an applicant for a certificate of naturalisation. An application fee of €175 is payable on application for a certificate of naturalisation and a fee is payable by applicants on the issue of a certificate of naturalisation. The standard certification fee is €950, while a reduced fee of €200 applies in the case of an application made on behalf of a minor or in certain circumstances when the application is made by a widow, widower or surviving civil partner of an Irish citizen. In the case of refugees and stateless persons the certification fee is nil.

The standard fees payable by an applicant are designed to reflect the effort and cost involved in processing applications for a certificate of naturalisation. Every application, including those made on the basis of marriage to an Irish citizen, must be assessed to establish if the statutory requirements are met. The granting of Irish citizenship through naturalisation is a privilege and an honour which confers certain rights and entitlements not only within the State but also at European Union level and it is important that appropriate procedures are in place to preserve the integrity of the process. There is no reduction in the fee payable in the case of an EU national or the spouse or civil partner of an Irish citizen.

As the Deputy will be aware I have introduced formal citizenship ceremonies at no extra cost to applicants. These have been universally well received by participants as the ceremonies

provide a sense of dignity and occasion that serves to underscore the importance to both the State and the applicant of the granting of Irish citizenship.

Proposed Legislation

154. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the timeline for his introduction of an updated child sex offenders Bill; if he will ensure this legislation provides that convicted sex offenders are not able to reside within a certain radius of schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43916/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): It would appear that the Deputy's question relates to updating of the Sex Offenders Act 2001.

The Sex Offenders Act 2001 introduced a range of measures to monitor convicted sex offenders, including notification arrangements ("Sex Offenders' Register"), sex offender orders and post-release supervision.

Measures to enhance the operation of the 2001 Act are included in the General Scheme of a wide-ranging Sexual Offences Bill, which I expect to bring to Government for approval within a matter of weeks. It is my intention to publish the General Scheme, in advance of drafting by the Office of Parliamentary Counsel, once my proposals have been considered by the Cabinet. It is not appropriate to comment in any detail on the contents of my legislative proposals until they have been considered by the Government.

I should emphasise that the priority has been and will continue to be minimising risk to the public. However, we have to be conscious of rights established under our Constitution and the European Convention on Human Rights. That includes the right of the public to protection from harm and the rights of persons who have completed their sentences and pose no future threat to society. These require that restrictive measures pursue a legitimate aim, are proportionate and balance the competing rights at issue.

Also, it should be noted that existing legislation makes provision for prohibitions on sex offenders in particular circumstances. Under section 16 of the 2001 Act, if the activities of a convicted sex offender give rise to concerns, the Gardaí can apply to the court for an order prohibiting him or her from doing one or more things specified in the order. That could include prohibiting a convicted sex offender from being at a particular location.

Garda Operations

155. **Deputy John Lyons** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will provide information on any Garda operations to prevent the growing problem of bicycle theft in Dublin; if he will engage with senior Gardaí to initiate a special operation similar to Project Cycle Ops in London; and if he will provide statistics on bicycle theft in Dublin for the past three years. [43917/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): An Garda Síochána is proactive in encouraging the public to protect their property, including bicycles, and a range of measures are in place to prevent and tackle the theft of bicycles.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that the Garda initiatives in this area include a crime prevention information leaflet on bicycle security, which is available on the Garda website, www.garda.ie. The leaflet emphasises the importance of bicycle owners keeping a record of

the bicycle frame identification number, colour and any other unique features. Furthermore, in July 2012, An Garda Síochána created a link from the Garda website to YouTube to promote a video on bicycle security which had been developed as a joint initiative by An Garda Síochána and Dublin City Council. I am also informed that An Garda Síochána is currently rolling out a pilot scheme in a number of Garda locations which allows members of the public to view on-line photographs of recovered property, including bicycles, on the Garda page of the social media site, Flickr.

I have requested a further report from the Garda authorities in relation to the particular issues raised by the Deputy about bicycle theft in Dublin and with respect to the UK initiative referred to. I will contact the Deputy directly as soon as that report is to hand.

With regard to the statistics requested by the Deputy, the Garda Síochána Act 2005 makes provision for the compilation and publication of crime statistics by the Central Statistics Office (CSO), as the national statistical agency, and the CSO has established a dedicated unit for this purpose.

I have requested the CSO to provide statistics directly to the Deputy.

Garda Operations

156. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will report on Garda Operation Trident; the number of persons arrested and charged as part of this operation; the number of successful convictions obtained; the amount of drugs seized; and if this operation is still active. [43922/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I am informed by the Garda authorities that Operation Trident was a policing initiative conducted between January and April 2013 targeting drug distribution in the South Dublin area.

I am advised that on foot of this Operation, which has now concluded, twenty nine people have been arrested and charged with offences relating to this investigation. I am further informed that the majority of these cases are currently before the courts and as such no convictions have been recorded to date.

In relation to the amount of drugs seized as a direct result of this Operation, I am advised by the Garda authorities that it would require a disproportionate use of Garda time and resources to obtain this information.

Road Traffic Offences

157. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will report on the number of vehicles seized by An Garda Síochána in the Garda R and J districts in years 2011, 2012 and to date in 2013. [43923/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I am informed by the Garda authorities that 1,220 vehicles were seized in 2011 in the R and J Garda Districts under the provisions of the Road Traffic Act, 1994. 1,174 vehicles were seized in 2012 and 926 to 15 October, 2013. It should be noted that the figures provided are provisional, operational and liable to change.

Residency Permits

158. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if stamp 4 will be updated in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 24; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43960/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The person concerned is a sibling of an Irish born citizen child of non-EEA parents born in the State prior to 1 January, 2005. The person concerned was granted permission to remain in the State on a stamp 4 basis for one year on 19 September, 2012. This permission was subsequently renewed on 19 September, 2013 and is valid until 19 September, 2014.

Queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to the INIS of my Department by e-mail using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. This service enables up-to-date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek information by way of the Parliamentary Questions process. The Deputy may consider using the e-mail service except in cases where the response from the INIS is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

Residency Permits

159. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 194 of 3 October 2013 and previous questions therein, if permission to remain may be granted in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 7; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43962/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The position with this person remains the same as was previously stated in my replies to Parliamentary Questions No. 194 of 3 October 2013 and No. 1103 of 18 September 2013.

The Deputy may wish to note that queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to INIS by e-mail using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. This service enables up to date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek information by way of the Parliamentary Questions process. The Deputy may consider using the e-mail service except in cases where the response from INIS is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

Naturalisation Applications

160. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the current position in regard to residency status/eligibility for naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 22; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43963/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The person concerned was granted temporary permission to remain in the State in 2001 under the arrangements then applicable to the non-EEA national parents of Irish born citizen children. This permission was renewed on a regular basis with the latest permission due to expire on 30 September, 2014.

An application for a certificate of naturalisation has been received from the person concerned. The application is being processed with a view to establishing whether the applicant meets the statutory conditions for the granting of naturalisation, such as good character and

lawful residence, and will be submitted to me for decision as expeditiously as possible.

Queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department by e-mail using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. This service enables up-to-date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek information by way of the Parliamentary Questions process. The Deputy may consider using the e-mail service except in cases where the response from the INIS is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

Immigration Status

161. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if temporary residency status will be granted in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Limerick who has been employed here and paid income tax under PAYE here for seven years and who was under the impression that they had the relevant residency entitlement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43964/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I have been informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person referred to by the Deputy does not have permission to be in the State. This is in breach of Section 5(1) of the Immigration Act 2004 which provides that no non-national may be in the State other than in accordance with the terms of any permission given to him or her by or on behalf of the Minister. Furthermore Section 5(2) of the Act provides that a non-Irish national who is in the State in contravention of subsection (1) is for all purposes unlawfully present in the State.

If the person mentioned by the Deputy has engaged in employment in the State without the appropriate employment permit both the person and the employer may be guilty of an offence under the Employment Permits Acts 2003 and 2006.

It would appear, from the information supplied by the Deputy, that the person concerned is unlawfully present in the State having first arrived here in June, 2005 and has entered employment contrary to national employment legislation. This is, of course, a matter of serious concern and officials of INIS will be in touch with the person concerning his position here.

Queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to INIS by e-mail using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. This service enables up to date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek information by way of the Parliamentary Questions process. The Deputy may consider using the e-mail service except in cases where the response from INIS is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

Refugee Status Appeals

162. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the current residency status in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43965/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The person concerned applied for asylum on 11 May, 2007. Her asylum application was refused following consideration of her case by the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner and, on appeal, the Refugee

Appeals Tribunal.

The person concerned initiated judicial review proceedings in the High Court, challenging the decision of the Refugee Appeals Tribunal in her case. Her judicial review leave application was dismissed by the High Court as an abuse of process on the 17 June 2013 with costs being awarded against the person concerned. Arising from the decision of the High Court, the earlier decisions of the Refugee Appeals Tribunal and the then Minister stood.

The position in the State of the person concerned will now be decided by reference to the provisions of Section 3(6) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended) and Section 5 of the Refugee Act 1996 (as amended) on the prohibition of refoulement. All representations submitted will be considered before a final decision is made. Once a final decision has been made, this decision, and the consequences of the decision, will be conveyed in writing to the person concerned.

Queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to the INIS of my Department by e-mail using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. This service enables up to date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek information by way of the Parliamentary Questions process. The Deputy may consider using the e-mail service except in cases where the response from the INIS is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

Naturalisation Applications

163. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the current residency status in the case of persons (details supplied) in County Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43966/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The first named person concerned made an application for a Certificate of Naturalisation in May, 2007. This application was refused and the person concerned was advised of this decision, and the reasons for the decision. It is open to this person, who has current permission to remain in the State until 1 October, 2014, to lodge a new application if and when he feels he is in a position to meet the statutory residency, and other, requirements applicable to such applications.

The second named person concerned was granted a Certificate of Naturalisation in August, 2003.

Queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to the INIS of my Department by e-mail using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. This service enables up to date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek information by way of the Parliamentary Questions process. The Deputy may consider using the e-mail service except in cases where the response from the INIS is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

Visa Applications

164. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if extension of visitor's visa will be granted in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43967/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I am advised by the Irish Natu-

ralisation and Immigration (INIS) of my Department that the person mentioned by the Deputy has not as yet made an application to INIS and should be advised to do so.

Queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to INIS by e-mail using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. This service enables up to date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek information by way of the Parliamentary Questions process. The Deputy may consider using the e-mail service except in cases where the response from INIS is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

Residency Permits

165. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position in regard to residency status/entitlement to apply for naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 15; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43968/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): In April, 2007, the person concerned made an application for residency in the State on the basis of being the spouse of an EU National who was exercising her EU Treaty Rights in this State. This application was approved and the person concerned was notified to this effect by letter dated 18 August, 2008. The person concerned completed the registration formalities to the extent that his permission to remain was valid to 25 October, 2012.

Given that the person concerned was no longer residing with his EU National spouse, he was not in a position to apply for the renewal of his permission to remain on the basis of marriage to an EU national. He has, however, sought a right of residency in the State, accompanied by a right to work, based on the principles of the European Court of Justice Judgment in the Zambrano case. Once a decision has been made on this latter application, this decision, and the consequences of the decision, will be conveyed in writing to the person concerned.

There is no record of an application for a Certificate of Naturalisation having been received from the person concerned. However, it will be open to him to apply to the Citizenship Division of my Department for a Certificate of Naturalisation when he is in a position to meet the lawful residency criteria applicable to the lodgment of such applications. Details on the criteria to be met by persons lodging such applications are available from the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service Website (www.inis.gov.ie).

Queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to the INIS of my Department by e-mail using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. This service enables up to date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek information by way of the Parliamentary Questions process. The Deputy may consider using the e-mail service except in cases where the response from the INIS is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

Residency Permits

166. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if, in the case of persons (details supplied) in County Meath who have a residency entitlement arising from their Irish-born children in the context of the Zambrano judgment, and in view of the extent to which the family has established commitments here, including employment, consideration may be given to awarding permission to remain in the first instance; and if he will make a statement

on the matter. [43969/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The persons concerned are a husband and wife who entered the State as students on separate dates in 2005 and were granted permission to remain until 23rd November, 2006 and 22nd February, 2006 respectively. They have remained in the State without permission since then. Consequently, in accordance with the provisions of Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), the persons concerned were notified, by separate letters dated 2nd February, 2009, that it was proposed to make deportation orders in respect of them. They were each given the options, to be exercised within 15 working days, of leaving the State voluntarily, of consenting to the making of a Deportation Order or of making written representations to the then Minister setting out the reasons why they should not have deportation orders made against them.

While substantial written representations have been submitted by and on behalf of the persons concerned, a representative of my Department wrote to the persons concerned on 10th October, 2013 requesting certain documentation and clarifications. Upon receipt of such documentation and clarifications, the immigration case files of the persons concerned will be decided by reference to the provisions of Section 3(6) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended) and Section 5 of the Refugee Act 1996 (as amended) on the prohibition of refoulement. All representations submitted will be considered before final decisions are made. Once decisions have been made, these decisions, and the consequences of the decisions, will be conveyed in writing to the persons concerned.

Given that none of the children of the persons concerned can claim an entitlement to Irish citizenship, it is difficult to see how the European Court of Justice Judgment in the Zambrano case would have any bearing on the immigration cases of the persons concerned.

Queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to the INIS of my Department by e-mail using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. This service enables up to date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek information by way of the Parliamentary Questions process. The Deputy may consider using the e-mail service except in cases where the response from the INIS is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

Residency Permits

167. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the current position in regard to residency status/entitlement for naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43970/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The person concerned was granted permission to remain in the State on 5 September, 2005 for an initial two year period, under the revised arrangements applicable to the non-EEA national parents of Irish born citizen children born in the State before 1 January, 2005, more commonly known as the IBC/05 Scheme. This permission was subsequently renewed for a further three years to 5 September, 2010, and more recently to 4 September, 2013. The person concerned has submitted an application for a renewal of permission to remain to my officials in the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department. My officials have written to the person concerned requesting the submission of certain items of documentation and information in support of his renewal application. Upon receipt of the requested documentation and information, the position of the person concerned will be further considered.

There is no record of an application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to in the Deputy's question.

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

- be of full age

- be of good character

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

- intend in good faith to continue to reside in the State after naturalisation

- have, before a judge of the District Court in open court, in a citizenship ceremony or in such manner as the Minister, for special reasons, allows—

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

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

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

Section 16 of the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended, provides that the Minister may, in his absolute discretion, waive some or all of the statutory conditions in certain circumstances i.e. where an applicant is of Irish descent or of Irish associations; where an applicant is a person who is a refugee within the meaning of the United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees; or where an applicant is a Stateless person within the meaning of the United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Stateless persons.

It is open to any individual to lodge an application for citizenship if and when they are in a position to meet the statutory requirements as prescribed in the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956 as amended.

Queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to the INIS by e-mail using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. This service enables up-to-date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek information by way of the Parliamentary Questions process. The Deputy may consider using the e-mail service except in cases where the response from the INIS is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

Residency Permits

168. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to

Parliamentary Question No. 1040 of 18 September 2013, if consideration may be given to extending stamp 4 status or leave to remain in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 11; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43971/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I wish to inform the Deputy that the person referred to has no entitlement to Stamp 4/Leave to Remain.

As outlined in previous Dail replies in this matter the person referred to has no application pending for residency. The person concerned was granted permission to remain for a period of five years on 12th January, 2010 on the basis of being the spouse of an EU citizen, who was residing in the State and was exercising his EU Treaty Rights.

The grounds under which she was granted permission to remain in the State no longer apply, as her EU spouse is no longer residing in this State. Therefore, the permission to remain which was granted under the provisions of Directive 2004/38/EC and European Communities (Free Movement of Persons) Regulations 2006 and 2008 has now been revoked. The person concerned was notified of this decision on 6th October, 2011.

Queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to the INIS by e-mail using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. This service enables up to date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek information by way of the Parliamentary Questions process. The Deputy may consider using the e-mail service except in cases where the response from the INIS is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

Divorce Process

169. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghaíl** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his views on the costs involved in progressing a legal separation or divorce in the State; his views on whether the costs of such activities may well be excessive; if he will consider means to control or reduce such costs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44017/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I fully understand that separation and divorce are extremely stressful times for couples and their families, and can be costly in both emotional and financial terms. There is a range of options open to separating couples depending on the degree to which they can reach mutually acceptable arrangements including, where relevant, in relation to custody of, and access to, their children. Where couples can reach mutually acceptable terms, they may separate by deed without the need to make any court applications, and the terms of the separation in relation to maintenance may be made a rule of court in the event of any future breach of the terms. They may also seek a judicial separation and, if they have been able to agree terms, they may ask the court to make orders based on their agreement. When they have been separated for four out of the previous five years, they may apply for a divorce and again, they may ask the court to make its orders based on any agreements they have come to, provided the agreements meet the Constitutional requirement of "proper provision".

As the Deputy will be aware, there is also a free Family Mediation Service to help separating couples agree the terms of any separation or divorce. Where couples can agree those terms through mediation, this can reduce any legal costs relating to court proceedings by minimising the issues to be so resolved. Information about the Family Mediation Service is available at www.legalaidboard.ie, or through Citizens Information Centres. Where couples have not reached any agreement and the proceedings are concerned extensively with determining the

division of assets, appropriate levels of maintenance, and arrangements concerning children, the legal costs will be higher. Ultimately, the reaching of agreement in relation to separation and divorce proceedings relies on the parties concerned and solutions cannot be imposed solely from a legal costs perspective.

It has also been my long-held view that there should be a dedicated and integrated Family Court structure to meet the particular needs of people involved in family proceedings. A commitment has been given in the Programme for Government to introduce a Constitutional Amendment to allow for the establishment of such a court to streamline family law court processes and to make them more efficient and less costly.

At a broader level, the issue of legal costs is being addressed by the Legal Services Regulation Bill 2011 which has commenced Committee Stage in the Dáil and is a key component of the Government's strategy aimed at reducing legal costs in this country and providing those involved in family or other proceedings with less costly alternatives. The Bill makes extensive provision, particularly in Part 9, for a new and enhanced legal costs regime that will bring greater transparency to how legal costs are charged along with a better balance between the interests of legal practitioners and those of their clients. Both barristers and solicitors will be obliged to provide more detailed information about legal costs from the outset of their dealings with clients. When there are any significant developments in a case which give rise to further costs the Bill provides that a client must be duly updated and given the option of whether or not to proceed with the case in question. The Bill also sets out a number of measures aimed at opening up the provision of legal services to new business models that can provide more tailored and competitive services for clients such as those involved in separation or divorce proceedings.

Crime Prevention

170. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will support local residents (details supplied) in Dublin 5 who are concerned about their safety and security when a paedophile is released soon from prison and who have concerns that there could be violence. [44042/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The Deputy will appreciate that it would not be appropriate for me to comment on individual cases. I can however assure him that all offenders subject to the notification requirements under the Sex Offenders Act 2001 are monitored by the Sex Offender Management and Intelligence Unit (SOMIU) at the Garda National Bureau of Criminal Investigation and that there is liaison between the Gardaí and the Prison Service authorities in advance of the release from prison of such persons. The Unit is supported by Garda Inspectors nominated in each Garda Division throughout the State and each such Inspector has access to all necessary Garda resources within that Division to assist in putting in place the required monitoring arrangements.

Naturalisation Applications

171. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will expedite the naturalisation application in respect of a person (details supplied). [44079/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that an application for a certificate of naturalisation has been received on behalf of the person referred to by the Deputy.

The application is currently being processed and will be submitted to me for decision as expeditiously as possible.

The Deputy may wish to note that queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to INIS by e-mail using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been established specifically for this purpose. This service enables up to date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek information by way of the Parliamentary Questions process. The Deputy may consider using the e-mail service except in cases where the response from INIS is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission Administration

172. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 158 of 10 October 2013 the reason he stated he had no function in determining the content of protocols and if this is the view of both the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission and the Garda Síochána, considering that the protocols provide a basis for timely and complete co-operation and considering that he knows the commission has requested independent access to PULSE on numerous occasions and that he has the power to bring forward amending legislation to compel such an arrangement. [44082/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): Section 108 of the Garda Síochána Act 2005 provides that the Ombudsman Commission and the Garda Commissioner shall, by written protocols, make arrangements concerning matters including the sharing of information between both organisations. I have no function in the making of such arrangements or in determining the protocols surrounding those arrangements.

As I stated in my reply to the Deputy of the 10th of October 2013, revised protocols were agreed and signed off by the Chairperson of the Ombudsman Commission and the Garda Commissioner last month. These revised protocols provide the Ombudsman Commission with access to PULSE through the two Garda Superintendents working on secondment with the Ombudsman Commission.

I also informed the Deputy in my earlier reply that I have established a committee chaired by a senior official of my Department, with senior representatives from the Ombudsman Commission and the Garda Síochána, to act as a forum where any future emerging issues concerning the protocols can be identified and appropriately addressed.

Referendum Expenditure

173. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will provide the total cost involved in holding the recent referendum; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44087/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I take it that the Deputy is referring to the referendum on the Court of Appeal. The estimated cost of the referendum was €1.5 million, although the actual cost may be less. It is not possible to quantify the exact cost at this time as the processing of all outlays is ongoing.

Firearms Licences

174. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 429 of 26 March and 13 June 2013, if the report from the Commissioner is now available. [44092/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I refer the Deputy to my reply by letter to Parliamentary Question Number 429 of 26 March, 2013. This reply, as set out in italics beneath, issued from my Office on 11 July, and was also a follow up reply to Question Number 117 of 13 June.

“I am writing to you further to the Parliamentary Question number 14875/13 you put down for answer on Tuesday, 26 March, in connection with the costs of recent judicial reviews in the firearms licensing area.

I understand that 22 separate Bills of Costs have, so far, been served on the Chief State Solicitor. These refer to some of the adjourned firearms judicial reviews as part of the agreement reached between the parties on 31 January 2012. No Bills of Costs have yet been received regarding the ‘test cases’. I understand that in the event of failure of the CSSO’s Costs Section to reach agreement on the costs of the 22 Bills of Costs submitted then it will be referred to a Taxing Master for adjudication. It is not possible to give more precise information at this stage.

I am also informed that the issue of costs being awarded in respect of District Court Appeals was the subject of a High Court judgment by Judge Peart on the 1st of May, 2013 in the case Hayes - V- Chief Superintendent Sheahan. In summary, the Judge found that existing court rules do not give a District Court Judge jurisdiction to award costs to an applicant, in the absence of any statutory power to award costs on appeal under Section 15A of the Firearms Acts.

In relation to the request for information for the total estimated cost of all Gardaí time in processing and providing backup to the legal actions, this is not readily available and the Garda Commissioner informs me that it would require a disproportionate amount of Garda time and resources to compile same.

While I have stated that the collapse of the test cases was because of issues associated with record keeping in relation to some applications it is worth noting that the Chief Superintendent is, in law, the persona designata and it is not for me to second guess his or her decision or somehow to assume that because legals costs were incurred that the wrong decision was made. I would not like it to deflect from the issue of the dangers presented by handguns and I am still considering a report submitted to me by the Garda Commissioner in this regard”.

17/10/2013WRR01950Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Payments

175. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a disadvantaged area scheme or area aid payment will be issued to a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43919/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named held a herd number jointly with his mother and they submitted applications to my Department under both the Single Payment Scheme and the Disadvantaged Scheme for 2013. The mother of the person named passed away after the submission of these applications.

As part of the payment for the Disadvantaged Area Scheme is due to the estate of the deceased herd owner, testamentary documents will be required before payment can be released.

A Transfer of Entitlements application was received on 31 July 2013, from the person named requesting the transfer of 37.89 Single Farm Payment entitlements from the joint herd number held with his late mother into his sole name. As this transfer was by way of inheritance, it was

also necessary to request testamentary documentation in support of this transfer. Under the Will of the deceased, other persons are the rightful beneficiaries of the Single Payment entitlements. Therefore, before the requested transfer can be completed, these persons must indicate their intention, if they so wish, to waive their rights in favour of the person named.

Furthermore, as the herd number was transferred into the sole name of the person named after the submission of a joint Single Payment Scheme application, it was necessary to request the Executors of the Will of the deceased to agree to undertake all the responsibilities associated with the Single Payment Scheme.

Officials from my Department are in contact with the person named regarding these outstanding matters.

Single Payment Scheme Appeals

176. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason a repayment has been requested in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43932/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The holding of the person named was subject to a Cross Compliance inspection on 15 November 2011. As part of this process the person named was requested to submit to the Department specific records, as required under the Nitrates Regulations, within 2 weeks of the date of the inspection.

The analysis of these records firstly indicated that the records were submitted after the deadline and secondly that there was insufficient storage capacity on the holding of the person named for the volume of organic fertiliser/livestock manure being generated. As a result a 20% penalty was applied against the 2011 Single Payment Scheme of the person named. The person named was informed of this decision on 29 August 2013.

As payment had already been made in respect of the 2011 Single Payment Scheme, an overpayment was recorded and officials from my Department contacted the person named on 8 October 2013 to explain how the monies owing could be repaid.

The person named has appealed the penalty decision and this request for a review is currently being examined. The person named will be notified of the outcome as soon as possible. In the event that the person named is dissatisfied with the outcome of the review, the decision can be appealed to the independent Agriculture Appeals Office within 3 months.

Single Payment Scheme Applications

177. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding a single farm payment in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43937/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named submitted a Single Farm Payment/Disadvantaged Areas Scheme application on 15 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.

Single Payment Scheme Eligibility

178. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will expedite a single farm payment application in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43946/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): As the person named does not possess any Single Payment Entitlements, nor has he declared the minimum qualifying area (3 hectares) under the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme, no payments under either Scheme are due. An official of my Department has been in direct contact with the person named to explain matters.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Applications

179. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payment will issue in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Roscommon; the reason for the delay in same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43959/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Payments under the 2013 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme commenced, on schedule, on 25 September and, to date, payments worth €169 million have issued nationally, to some 80,115 applicants, with payments continuing to issue on a twice weekly basis, with individual cases being paid as they are confirmed eligible. As processing of the 2013 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme application of the person named has recently been finalised, payment will shortly issue, directly to the nominated bank account of the person named.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Applications

180. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a disadvantaged area scheme-area aid payment will issue in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43981/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Payments under the 2013 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme commenced, on schedule, on 25 September and, to date, payments worth €169 million have issued nationally, to some 80,115 applicants, with payments continuing to issue on a twice weekly basis, with individual cases being paid as they are confirmed eligible. As processing of the 2013 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme application of the person named has recently been finalised, payment will shortly issue, directly to the nominated bank account of the person named.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Applications

181. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a disadvantaged area scheme-area aid payment will issue in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43985/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Payments under the 2013 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme commenced, on schedule, on 25 September and, to date, payments worth €169 million have issued nationally, to some 80,115 applicants, with payments continuing to issue on a twice weekly basis, with individual cases being paid as they are confirmed eligible. As processing of the 2013 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme application of the person named has recently been finalised, payment will shortly issue, directly to the nominated bank account of the person named.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Applications

182. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a 2013 disadvantaged areas scheme payment will issue in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44016/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Payments under the 2013 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme commenced, on schedule, on 25 September and, to date, payments worth €169 million have issued nationally, to some 80,115 applicants, with payments continuing to issue on a twice weekly basis, with individual cases being paid as they are confirmed eligible. As processing of the 2013 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme application of the person named has recently been finalised, payment will shortly issue, directly to the nominated bank account of the person named.

Single Payment Scheme Appeals

183. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding a disadvantaged areas scheme payment in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44045/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named submitted a Single Farm Payment/Disadvantaged Areas Scheme application on 15 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/cross compliance inspection.

The ground eligibility inspection has been completed and the results are now being finalised. In the event that any queries arise officials of my Department will shortly be in contact with the person named.

During the course of the cross compliance inspection discrepancies were recorded in relation to cattle identification and registration requirements, resulting in a 1% penalty. The person named was notified of this decision on 20 September 2013.

The person named has appealed this decision and this request for a review is currently being examined. The person named will be notified of the outcome of this review as soon as possible. In the event that the person named is dissatisfied with the outcome of the review, the decision can be appealed to the independent Agriculture Appeals Office within 3 months.

Single Payment Scheme Payments

184. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 524 of 25 June 2013 if a review has been completed in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Galway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44052/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): As part of the review of this case, the person named was again recently contacted by an official of my Department, on foot of which, it was agreed that the original maps submitted by the person named (under the old Area Aid Scheme) should be reviewed; it was agreed with the person named that an official of my Department will again contact the person named next week in connection with this review.

Agriculture Schemes Payments

185. **Deputy Heather Humphreys** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will instruct his Department to issue disadvantaged areas and single farm payments on the remainder of the holding which is in order where there is a portion of land that represents 1% or less of the holding over which there is a discrepancy, so as to alleviate the financial pressure on farmers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44068/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): I am very conscious in the context of the ongoing review of the Land Parcel Identification System (LPIS) of the need, given the financial pressure on many farmers, to minimise the impact on payments under the Single Payment and Disadvantaged Areas schemes. Accordingly arrangements have been put in place, whereby applicants with any over-claims which arise during the processing of their 2013 SPS applications, are processed immediately for payment with the reduction and, if appropriate, the relevant penalty applied. This is reflected in the payment figures under the SPS, on 16th October 2013, with €540 million paid to 108,000 farmers. To date total payments of €169 million have issued to 80,000 farmers under the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme. This means that my Department has achieved the commitment given that the parcel review process would not hold up payments.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Applications

186. **Deputy Heather Humphreys** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) in County Monaghan will receive their disadvantaged area payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44069/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Payments under the 2013 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme commenced, on schedule, on 25 September and, to date, payments worth €169 million have issued nationally, to some 80,115 applicants, with payments continuing to issue on a twice weekly basis, with individual cases being paid as they are confirmed eligible. As processing of the 2013 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme application of the person named has recently been finalised, payment will shortly issue, directly to the nominated bank account of the person named.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Applications

187. **Deputy Heather Humphreys** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine

when a person (details supplied) in County Monaghan will receive their disadvantaged area payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44070/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Payments under the 2013 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme commenced, on schedule, on 25 September and, to date, payments worth €169 million have issued nationally, to some 80,115 applicants, with payments continuing to issue on a twice weekly basis, with individual cases being paid as they are confirmed eligible. As processing of the 2013 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme application of the person named has recently been finalised, payment will shortly issue, directly to the nominated bank account of the person named.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Applications

188. **Deputy Heather Humphreys** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) in County Monaghan will receive their disadvantaged area payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44071/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Payments under the 2013 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme commenced, on schedule, on 25 September and, to date, payments worth €169 million have issued nationally, to some 80,115 applicants, with payments continuing to issue on a twice weekly basis, with individual cases being paid as they are confirmed eligible. As processing of the 2013 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme application of the person named has recently been finalised, payment will shortly issue, directly to the nominated bank account of the person named.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Applications

189. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a disadvantaged area scheme/area aid payment will be made in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44078/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): While an application under the 2013 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme was received from the person named on 22 April 2013, payment has not yet issued as the holding has not yet satisfied the Scheme minimum stocking density requirements.

Applicants are required to maintain 0.15 livestock units for a minimum retention period of seven consecutive months, in addition to maintaining an annual average of 0.15 livestock units calculated over the 12 months of the scheme year. Livestock must be owned, possessed, held and maintained by the person named in order to meet the minimum stocking level. While the person named had livestock on the holding for feeding purposes, as these animals were in the ownership of another farmer, they cannot be counted for stocking purpose on the application of the person named under the Terms and Conditions of the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme.

Early Child Care Education Issues

190. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the timeline for publication for the early years strategy which is currently being prepared by her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43947/13]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Early Years Strategy which is one of three, more detailed strategies under the high-level Children and Young People's Policy Framework is currently being developed by my Department.

Following my announcement that I would lead the preparation of Ireland's first Early Years Strategy, I appointed an Expert Advisory Group, chaired by Dr. Eilis Hennessy of UCD to advise my Department and I on recommendations for inclusion in the Strategy. The work of this group has now been concluded and their comprehensive report, entitled 'Right from the Start' was presented to me last week. The next step will be consultation on the recommendations in the report, which will take place over the next two months. I expect the Strategy to be brought to Government before the end of the year.

Foster Care Supports

191. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the rates for foster payments that will apply in 2014. [43982/13]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Decisions in relation to foster care rates for 2014 have not yet been taken. My Office is currently liaising with the Department of Finance regarding the rates of the Foster Care Allowance to apply.

Alcohol Pricing

192. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health his plans to ban below cost selling of alcohol; if legislation is required or if an order will be made to that effect under current legislation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44036/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): Proposals are currently being finalised on foot of the recommendations in the Steering Group Report on a National Substance Misuse Strategy 2012. These proposals cover all of the areas mentioned in the report, including measures on access and availability of alcohol; controls on alcohol advertising and sponsorship; labelling of alcohol products, and legislation on minimum unit pricing. The Cabinet Committee on Social Policy has considered these proposals and it is intended to bring forward a finalised package of proposals for consideration by Government shortly. In the meantime, work on developing a framework for the necessary Department of Health legislation is continuing.

Minimum unit pricing is a mechanism of imposing a statutory floor in price levels per gram of alcohol that must be legally observed by retailers in both the on and off trade sector. A health impact assessment, in conjunction with Northern Ireland, is being commissioned as part of the process of developing a legislative basis for minimum unit pricing. The assessment will study the impact of different minimum prices on a range of areas such as health, crime and likely economic impact.

The provision of such a price measure for alcohol - as opposed to fiscal measures - is aimed chiefly at preventing the sale of alcohol at very cheap prices. A minimum pricing regime is a proportional policy exigency that allows the State to engage another parameter to deal with managing the supply of alcohol for the purpose of preventing its misuse. It is a policy aimed at those who drink in a harmful and hazardous manner.

Medical Card Data

193. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if he will supply in tabular form, the number of discretionary medical cards in each local health area at the end of 2010, 2011 and 2012; and the most recent figures for same [43890/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): The information sought by the Deputy is not readily available. However, I have asked the Health Service Executive to supply this information to me and I will forward it to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Medical Card Data

194. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide in tabular form, according to local health area the number of medical cards discontinued as a result of the Budget 2013 changes implemented in the Health (Alteration of Criteria for Eligibility) Act 2013 [43891/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): The information sought by the Deputy is not readily available. However, I have asked the Health Service Executive to supply this information to me and I will forward it to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Maternity Services

195. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Health the position in relation to the response from the Coombe Hospital, Dublin, the Rotunda Hospital, Dublin, and the National Maternity Hospital, Holles Street, Dublin, to the enquiry from the Health Information and Quality Authority investigation as to whether they had implemented the 27 recommendations of the Health Service Executive McCabe report in 2007, HSE inquiry into the tragic death of persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43905/13]

196. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Health the position in relation to the instruction given to the Coombe Hospital, Dublin, the Rotunda Hospital, Dublin and the National Maternity Hospital Holles Street, Dublin with respect to the implementation of the 27 recommendations of the Health Service Executive McCabe report in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43906/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 195 and 196 together.

I am determined that the recommendations of the HSE inquiry into the death of Tania McCabe and her infant son Zach at Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital in 2007, and the recently published HIQA Report of the care and treatment provided to Ms. Halappanavar, will be fully implemented and that any actions required will be implemented across our health services. To ensure this, I have written to the Chairman of the Board of HIQA requesting that the Authority ensures that the monitoring of progress against the recommendations of the HIQA Report of the care and treatment provided to Ms. Halappanavar is a priority as part of its monitoring programme against the National Standards for Safer Better Healthcare. I have also written to the Director General of the HSE giving further directions on how progress on the implementation of the recommendations should be monitored and reported. The process for implementing recommendations will also address any outstanding issues arising from the HSE inquiry into the death of Tania McCabe and her infant son Zach.

I am determined that out of the sad loss of these young women our whole health system will

learn lessons that will ensure that it provides safe, patient-centred care.

With regard to the specific questions raised by the Deputy, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to him.

Hospital Staff Recruitment

197. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the reason no paediatrics urologist has been appointed to Temple Street University Hospital despite the Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalous Ireland organisation being told in February 2012 that the post was ready to be filled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43921/13]

198. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health his views that the appointment of a paediatric urologist at Temple Street University Hospital will in view of the ongoing debate on organ donation prove to be a proactive measure in trying to prevent the need for future kidney transplants amongst patients such as spina bifida sufferers [43927/13]

223. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health in view of the fact that renal failure is one of the top causes of death for children with spina bifida, the reason since 2009, when spina bifida care was transferred to Temple Street University Hospital, there has not been a paediatric urologist established in the hospital to carry out routine monitoring tests such as blood test for kidneys, renal ultrasound, DMSA scan, bladder function assessment, video urodynamic study and spinal MRI which may prevent fatal kidney failure; the reason the recent vacancy for a paediatric urologist by the HSE has not been filled yet and when the appointment will be made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44041/13]

231. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health if he will justify the fact that there has been no paediatric urologist at Temple Street Hospital despite the absolute requirement for such a position to be available for treating children with spina bifida who could die from kidney failure and that they will commit to the provision of a urology monitoring system at the hospital [44081/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 197, 198, 223 and 231 together.

The Children's University Hospital, Temple Street is the national tertiary care centre for spina bifida and hydrocephalus. All infants born in Ireland with Spina Bifida are transferred to Temple Street after birth for ongoing neonatal management. Children with spina bifida are seen by a multidisciplinary team at Temple Street which includes a Consultant Paediatrician with a special interest in Spina Bifida, a Spina Bifida Nurse Specialist and Neurosurgery input. It is intended to recruit a consultant urologist in order to ensure dedicated urology input. A recruitment process took place in 2009/2010 and again in 2012/2013. As neither was successful, a new recruitment process is now in train and I am advised that the HSE is hopeful that this new recruitment process will result in a suitable candidate taking up the post.

In the interim, spina bifida patients are being reviewed by a consultant surgeon who has been granted honorary status at the hospital. The hospital has also completed negotiations to establish a regular clinic with a UK paediatric urologist. Dates have now been scheduled in October and December for visits from this urologist and an appropriate Service Level Agreement is in place. As an interim arrangement, those children requiring urgent urological input are prioritised clinically and seen in the UK under the Treatment Abroad Scheme. All patients are being kept under regular review and are referred on a case by case basis to the UK for treatment, pending the appointment of a permanent urologist.

Health Insurance Cover

199. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons availing of private health insurance for each of the years 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, and to date in 2013 in each of the following age groups, 17 years and under, 18 to 29 years, 30 to 39 years, 40 to 49 years, 50 to 59 years, 60 to 69 years, 70 to 79 years, 80 years and over; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43935/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The latest data available to me from the Health Insurance Authority on the numbers insured with open membership private health insurers is as follows:

MEMBERSHIP	-
End 2008	-
Age Group	Market
17 & under	518189
18 - 29	334372
30 - 39	370084
40 - 49	322627
50 - 59	268526
60 - 69	188676
70 - 79	96071
80 & over	37014
Total	2135559
End 2009	-
Age Group	Market
17 & under	518236
18 - 29	309892
30 - 39	364506
40 - 49	320916
50 - 59	272324
60 - 69	197341
70 - 79	100839
80 & over	38695
Total	2122749
End 2010	-
Age Group	Market
17 & under	506156
18 - 29	284479
30 - 39	351248
40 - 49	315640
50 - 59	272164
60 - 69	203808
70 - 79	106035
80 & over	41502
Total	2081032
End 2011	-

MEMBERSHIP	-
Age Group	Market
17 & under	492165
18 - 29	260971
30 - 39	334317
40 - 49	310086
50 - 59	270048
60 - 69	208366
70 - 79	110354
80 & over	44857
Total	2031164
End 2012	-
Age Group	Market
17 & under	476983
18 - 29	234221
30 - 39	314142
40 - 49	303541
50 - 59	267065
60 - 69	212223
70 - 79	114706
80 & over	47410
Total	1970291

Health Insurance Levy

200. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if Voluntary Health Insurance Healthcare will seek authorisation from the Central Bank of Ireland before the end of 2013; the estimated financial cost to the State of same; if the company's reinsurance agreement with Berkshire Hathaway will have any impact on this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43939/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The Government agreed in December 2011 to address the European Court of Justice ruling of September 2011 and to work with the VHI in its application process for authorisation by the Central Bank of Ireland (CBI) subject to further Government consideration of any application for authorisation. Officials from my Department, the VHI and the CBI continue to engage regularly to progress the application. My Department is also in regular contact with the EU Commission in relation to the authorisation and related State Aid issues.

Given the recent private health insurance market developments, including changes to taxation and the report of the Health Insurance Authority in relation to Risk Equalisation, further analysis will be required. The VHI's readiness for authorisation and any subsequent capital requirements will be determined by the CBI after their assessment of VHI's application, taking into account their business plan, which may include options such as reinsurance.

Reinsurance, used to reduce the risks associated with underwritten policies by spreading risks across alternative institutions, may provide for the possibility of a reduction in capital requirements for VHI's authorisation. Future capital requirements will depend on the nature and length of any reinsurance deal that VHI can secure. The CBI will take reinsurance into account

when determining VHI's solvency and consequent capitalisation requirements.

Medical Card Data

201. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Health the steps he is taking to stop general practitioners charging medical card holders for blood tests; the way he can address the inconsistencies that exist between different medical practices and the charges they implement for such blood tests; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43956/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): Under paragraph 11 of the General Medical Services (GMS) contract, a general practitioner (GP) is expected to provide his/her patients who hold a medical card or GP visit card with all proper and necessary treatment of a kind generally undertaken by a GP and not requiring special skill or experience of a degree or kind which GPs cannot reasonably be expected to possess.

Under paragraph 27 of the GMS contract, a medical practitioner shall not demand or accept any payment or consideration whatsoever in reward for services provided by him/her, or for travelling or for other expenses incurred by him/her or for the use of any premises, equipment or instruments in making the services available.

In circumstances where the taking of blood is necessary to either (a) assist in the process of diagnosing a patient or (b) monitor a diagnosed condition, the GP may not charge that patient if they are eligible for free GMS services under the Health Act, 1970, as amended.

The HSE has written to GP contract holders and clarified the position in relation to this matter and has also communicated its position to the Irish Medical Organisation. Any alleged instances of eligible patients being requested to pay for a routine service of this nature from their own limited resources is viewed as a serious matter by the HSE and the Department.

I have been advised by the HSE that its Local Health Offices will fully investigate any reported incidents of eligible patients being charged for phlebotomy services which form part of the investigation and necessary treatment of patients' symptoms or conditions. In such cases, where a medical card holder or a GP visit card holder has been inappropriately charged for the taking of blood, the HSE will make deductions from those GPs' routine GMS payments.

Officials in my Department are in consultation with the HSE with a view to drawing up a new GMS contract. The appropriate arrangements in relation to phlebotomy services will be considered as part of the new contract.

National Lottery Funding Applications

202. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding an application for national lottery funding in respect of an organisation (details supplied) in County Cork. [43958/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): My Department has received an application for funding from the 2013 National Lottery allocation from the organisation in question. This is one of a large number currently being assessed. The Deputy will be informed of the outcome of the application as soon as a decision has been made.

Mental Health Services Report

203. **Deputy Seán Ó Feargháil** asked the Minister for Health the key elements of Vision for Change that have been implemented; the key elements that have yet to be achieved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43961/13]

205. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the key elements of Vision for Change that have been implemented; the key elements that have yet to be achieved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43989/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): I propose to take Questions Nos. 203 and 205 together.

Implementation of *A Vision for Change* (AVFC) and the reform of our mental health services is a priority for this Government. Implementation of AVFC has been slower than originally expected. It has been delayed by a number of factors including the changed economic context, constraints in public spending and the moratorium on recruitment.

Nonetheless, a great deal of progress has been made with the accelerated closure of old psychiatric hospitals and their replacement with bespoke new facilities, better suited to modern mental health care. Progress also includes shorter episodes of in-patient care and the involvement of service users in all aspects of mental health policy, service planning and delivery.

A modern mental health service is best delivered in the community and in 2012 a special allocation of €35m was provided primarily to further strengthen Community Mental Health Teams in both adult and children's mental health services, to advance activities in the area of suicide prevention, to initiate the provision of psychological and counselling services in primary care, specifically for people with mental health problems and to facilitate the re-location of mental health service users from institutional care to more independent living arrangements in their communities, in line with AVFC. 414 posts were approved to implement the €35m package of special measures.

Budgetary pressures within the HSE delayed the full utilisation of this funding, but this sum is now available to mental health services along with an additional €35m allocated in Budget 2013 for the continued development of mental health services across a range of headings, including the further development of forensic services and community mental health teams for adults, children, older persons with a mental illness and those with an intellectual disability and mental illness. 477 posts have been approved to implement these measures.

As at 30 September 2013, the recruitment process is complete for 378 or 91% of the 414 posts approved in 2012. There are a number of posts for which there are difficulties in identifying suitable candidates due to factors including availability of qualified candidates and geographic location, and the remainder are at various stages in the recruitment process.

Of the 477 posts approved in 2013, as at 30th September 2013, 255 or 54% of these posts were in the final stages of the recruitment process and a further 149 were at earlier stages, indicating that 85% of posts are in the recruitment process. The HSE's National Recruitment Service is currently working to ensure that the remaining posts will be filled as soon as possible, from existing panels or through competition in the absence of panels, at the earliest opportunity. Options to enable more local recruitment are also being considered where this will assist in filling specific posts. I have received assurances from the HSE that the recruitment process for these new posts is being given priority within the HSE.

Budget 2014 provides €20 million ringfenced for mental health services which will enable the HSE to continue to develop and modernise our mental health services in line with the recommendations of AVFC, and will allow for the recruitment of additional staff to further en-

hance our Adult, Child and Adolescent and Specialist Community Mental Health Teams. This will bring to €90 million the total investment ringfenced by the Government in mental health services since 2012 up to end 2014. This significant investment in mental health in recent years demonstrates the Government's ongoing commitment to the implementation of *A Vision for Change*.

Medical Card Applications

204. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if and when a medical card will issue in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43983/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible. The Health Service Executive operates the General Medical Services scheme, which includes medical cards and GP visit cards, under the Health Act 1970, as amended. It has established a dedicated contact service for members of the Oireachtas specifically for queries relating to medical cards and GP visit cards, which the Deputy may wish to use for an earlier response. Contact information has issued to Oireachtas members.

Question No. 205 answered with Question No. 203.

Mental Health Services Provision

206. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the number of the 477 community mental positions promised in the past two budgets that have been filled; if he will provide in tabular form the number of these positions filled and the numbers unfilled in each local health area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43990/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): This Government has prioritised the reform of our mental health services in line with *A Vision for Change* and is committed in particular to the delivery of more and better quality care in the community. Additional funding totalling €70 million and some 900 new posts have been provided as part of the last two Budgets primarily to strengthen Community Mental Health Teams for both adults and children and to enhance specialist community mental health services for older people with a mental illness, those with an intellectual disability and mental illness and forensic mental health services in line with *A Vision for Change*.

Of the 414 posts allocated in 2012, as at 30th September 2013, the recruitment process is complete for 378 or 91%, of the posts. A number of the remaining posts are at various stages in the recruitment process. In addition, there are a number of posts for which there are difficulties in identifying suitable candidates due to various factors including the availability of qualified candidates and geographical location. Of the 477 posts approved in 2013, as at 30th September 2013, 255 or 54% of these posts were in the final stages of the recruitment process and a further 149 were at earlier stages, indicating that 85% of posts are in the recruitment process. I have received assurances from the HSE that the filling of these posts is being given priority within the HSE. In relation to the specific question on the number of positions filled or unfilled in each local health area, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly with this information.

Treatment Abroad Scheme

207. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if it is possible for a family to apply for the treatment abroad scheme for their child who needs rehabilitation and the type needed is not available here. [43998/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The HSE operates a Treatment Abroad Scheme (TAS), for persons entitled to treatment in another EU/EEA member state or Switzerland under EU Regulation 1408/71, as per procedures set out in EU Regulation 574/72 and in accordance with Department of Health and Children Guidelines. Within these governing EU Regulations and the Department of Health and Children's Guidelines, the TAS provides for the cost of approved treatments in another EU/EEA member state or Switzerland through the issue of form E112 (IE).

The TAS allows for an Irish based consultant to refer a patient that is normally resident in Ireland for treatment in another EU member state or Switzerland, where the treatment in question meets the following criteria:

(a) The application to refer a patient abroad has been assessed and a determination given before that patient goes abroad.

(b) Following clinical assessment, the referring consultant certifies the following:

- *They recommend the patient be treated in another EU/EEA country or Switzerland;*
- *The treatment is medically necessary and will meet the patient's needs;*
- *The treatment is a proven form of medical treatment and is not experimental or test treatment;*
- *The treatment is in a recognised hospital or other institution and is under the control of a registered medical practitioner;*
- *The hospital outside the state will accept EU/EEA form E112 (IE).*

Patients in conjunction with their Irish based public referring hospital consultant have the ability to apply to the HSE TAS seeking access to public health care outside the state through model form E112. Applications to the TAS are processed and a determination given in accordance with the statutory framework prior to a patient travelling to avail of treatment. Approved applicants/patient's hospital treatment costs are covered through the issue of form E112 (IE) for specific identified episodes of care. The governing Regulations do not provide for the patient's travel or subsistence costs but the HSE in line with its national travel policy provides funding for patient's air or sea fares.

Once a patient is discharged from a specific episode of care abroad, their care immediately reverts to their Irish based consultant.

Further information on the scheme is available on the HSE website <http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/1/schemes/treatmentabroad/> or by contacting the HSE Treatment Abroad Scheme office on 056 778 4551 or via email on treatmentabroad.scheme@hse.ie. Application forms and information documents can be obtained through that office.

Health Services Provision

208. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide details of any reciprocal arrangements that apply between Ireland and other countries concerning the provision of medical cards or health services to persons from other jurisdictions residing here and vice versa; if these benefits are means tested in any way; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44000/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): In relation to persons on a temporary visit to Ireland, under EU Regulations a person who becomes ill or injured while on a temporary stay in any EU/EEA Member State or Switzerland may be available of emergency health care in the public health system of the country under the terms of that country's public health system. The European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) is issued to facilitate this process. In Ireland such a person is treated as if they have full eligibility (i.e. have a medical card) and no charge is levied. Irish citizens are treated in a similar manner when they require such emergency public health care within the EU/EEA and Switzerland (and produce their EHIC), the arrangements are reciprocal and Ireland provides services to citizens of other EU/EEA States and Switzerland while they provide emergency care to our citizens.

A Reciprocal Agreement exists for Treatment for Medical Care for Temporary Visitors between Australia and Ireland and provides that where a resident of Australia is temporarily in Ireland, and needs immediate necessary medical treatment while in Ireland, they shall be provided with such medical treatment as is clinically necessary for the diagnosis, alleviation or care of the condition requiring attention, as a public patient within the public health care system on terms no less favourable than would apply to a resident of Ireland.

In relation to Australia, "resident" means a person who is an Australian resident for the purposes of the Health Insurance Act 1973 and holds either a current Australian passport or any other current passport endorsed to the effect that the holder is entitled to reside indefinitely in Australia.

Where a person is ordinarily resident in Ireland and belongs to one of the following groups, they will qualify for a Medical Card under EU Regulations. They are:

- living in Ireland and receiving a social security payment from another European Union / European Economic Area (EU/EEA) country or Switzerland and are not getting an Irish social welfare payment (apart from Child Benefit or Early Childcare Supplement). The person must not be liable to contribute to the Irish Social Welfare System, (i.e. PRSI)

- living in Ireland and working in another EU/EEA country or Switzerland and are liable to pay Social Insurance Contributions in that country

- living in Ireland and is the dependent spouse or child of someone employed in another EU/EEA country and Switzerland. The person must not be getting an Irish Social Welfare Payment apart from Child Benefit or Early Childcare Supplement and must not be liable to contribute to the Irish social welfare system.

Means testing does not apply to medical cards granted under EU Regulations.

Hospice Services

209. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide an update regarding the delay in opening the 24-bed unit in Blanchardstown hospice; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44010/13]

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

Drug Treatment Programmes Funding

210. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the serious funding pressures faced by Cork Local Drugs Task Force, that their budget has been reduced significantly since 2008 and if he will protect their budget in 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44012/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): No decisions have been taken yet in relation to the allocations to Drugs Task Forces for 2014. The matter is currently under consideration. It is anticipated that Drugs Task Forces will be informed of their allocations later in the year.

Disability Support Services Expenditure

211. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that there has been a 21% reduction in the operational budget of the Daughters of Charity Services for persons with intellectual disabilities since 2009; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the chief executive officer believes that any further reduction in funding will result in the closure of services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44014/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Procedures

212. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghaíl** asked the Minister for Health if he will ensure that a medical procedure is carried out in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44015/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The National Waiting List Management Policy, *A standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, January 2013*, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists. In relation to this particular query raised by the Deputy, I have asked the Health Service Executive to investigate the situation and respond directly to the Deputy in this matter.

HSE Agency Staff Expenditure

213. **Deputy Patrick Nulty** asked the Minister for Health the level of spending on agency nursing staff by the Health Service Executive to date in 2013; the measures he is taking to reduce this spend; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44019/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): Agency staffing arrangements are intended to be used in the health service to address short-term needs, such as periods of staff absence for maternity leave or due to illness. In recent years there has been an increase in usage of such arrangements, which are expensive and not ideal from a continuity-of-care perspective. There are a number of measures in train to address the level of spending on agency nursing staff.

In the first instance, the Public Service Stability Agreement 2013 - 2016 (The Haddington

Road Agreement) provides for staff throughout the health service staff to increase their working hours. The value ascribed to this element of the Agreement is in the region of five million hours annually for the health workforce as a whole. In the case of nurses and midwives, the standard working-week has increased from 37.5 to 39 hours. One of the principal ways in which this measure will lead to savings is to enable the service's reliance on agency staffing and overtime working to be reduced. My Department has emphasised to the HSE the need for a clear focus by managers on maximising the benefits in this regard.

The Haddington Road Agreement also provides for the implementation of the Graduate Nurse/Midwife Placement Initiative on an agreed basis with the health unions. Staff are currently being appointed under this scheme and the additional resource which they represent will also contribute to savings on agency and overtime expenditure. In addition, as part of the 2014 Estimates process it has been agreed that the HSE will establish a Nurse Bank. This measure will improve the continuity of nurse-provided care and will also reduce reliance on agency staffing. As the level of spending on agency nursing staff by the Health Service Executive to date in 2013 is an operational matter, it has been referred to the Executive for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Mental Health Services Funding

214. **Deputy Patrick Nulty** asked the Minister for Health the action he is taking to ensure that the target of spending 8% of the health budget on mental health is reached; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44020/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): In 2013, 5.5% of the Health Service Executive Budget (€733 million) will be spent on specialist mental health services. Since 2012, funding has been at a lower percentage than in previous years as prior to that the figures in the Revised Estimates for Public Services for Health Care Group Areas such as Mental Health included an allocated share in relation to both pension and corporate costs, which are now shown separately. In addition, about 1 in 4 people experience mental health problems in their lifetime, many of whom will be dealt with in primary care. It is estimated that approximately 90% of mental health problems are dealt with in primary care and some 30% of people who attend primary care have a mental health problem and expenditure on these services is not captured in this percentage.

This Government has prioritised the reform of our mental health services in line with *A Vision for Change* our strategy for the development of our mental health services and is committed in particular to the delivery of more and better quality care in the community. Additional funding totalling €70 million and some 900 new posts have been provided as part of the last two Budgets primarily to strengthen Community Mental Health Teams for both adults and children and to enhance specialist community mental health services for older people with a mental illness, those with an intellectual disability and mental illness and forensic mental health services in line with *A Vision for Change*.

In Budget 2014, the Government has again re-committed to the continuation of the development of this critical service for a highly vulnerable group in these extremely challenging times, where the options for additional expenditure generally are very constrained. A sum of €20 million is being ring-fenced for the further development of our mental health services in 2014. This €20m means that, despite serious resource pressures overall, funding of €90m has been made available since 2012, up to the end of 2014, that has been specifically ear-marked for mental health and suicide prevention.

Organ Donation

215. **Deputy Patrick Nulty** asked the Minister for Health the action he is taking to ensure that the rate of organ donation here improves substantially; if he will appoint transplant coordinators in each hospital as part of this effort; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44021/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): My Department is working with the HSE's National Organ Donation and Transplantation Office to establish the required infrastructure to improve organ donation and transplantation rates. Priority areas for action in 2014 are being identified and the deployment of key donation personnel will be considered in this context.

Suicide Prevention

216. **Deputy Patrick Nulty** asked the Minister for Health the reason only one of the eight key recommendations of the Reach Out National Suicide Prevention Strategy has been implemented in full; when all the recommendations in the strategy will be fully implemented; the action he is taking to ensure that the Strategy is fully implemented without further delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44022/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): *Reach Out* our National Strategy for Action on Suicide Prevention 2005-2014 comprises of four levels of action i.e. - general population approach; targeted approach; responding to suicide; and information and research. It contains 26 action areas and 96 recommendations.

The HSE's National Office for Suicide Prevention (NOSP) was established in 2005 on foot of a recommendation in *Reach Out* and its role is to oversee the implementation of *Reach Out* and to coordinate suicide prevention initiatives around the country. The NOSP is advised and guided by an advisory group comprising individuals with considerable knowledge and expertise in the areas of suicide prevention, mental health promotion and bereavement support.

Since 2011, funding for the NOSP has increased significantly from €4 million in 2011 to €7.9 million in 2013. This increase in funding along with the additional investment in mental health has led to work being progressed on almost every recommendation in *Reach Out* including the following actions:

- Supporting over 40 individual organisations and programmes both internal and external to the HSE. This increase in funding has focused on resourcing front line services for persons who are in emotional distress, who have engaged in self harm or who have been bereaved through suicide. Many of these services are being delivered by Non-Governmental Organisation sector with direct funding from the NOSP, i.e. Pieta House, Samaritans and Console.

- Working to build the capacity of frontline services providers and communities to respond to suicide through the delivery of a number of suicide prevention training programmes i.e. over 42,000 participants have completed the ASSIT and safeTALK programmes. In addition, the NOSP has invested significantly in the development of Dialectical Behavioural Therapy (DBT) services across community mental health teams.

- The NOSP resourced the Irish College of General Practitioners (ICGP) to implement a training programme on suicide prevention for GPs and general practice staff. International evidence highlights GP training in depression and the management of suicidal behaviour as critical to reducing suicide rates.

- The development of the National Clinical Care Programme for Self Harm in Emergency Departments and the SCAN (Suicide Crisis Assessment Nurse) service.

- The delivery of two effective social marketing campaigns on mental health that have changed public attitudes and behaviours related to help seeking and mental health. The NOSP is also working to develop a new national communication strategy for suicide prevention.

- The NOSP is currently working with the Irish Association of Suicidology and other partners to develop national standards for service providers that will improve the quality and safety of funded services.

- The NOSP in partnership with the Department of Education and Skills launched the *Well-Being in Post Primary Schools Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention*. These guidelines have been distributed to schools and health services on a nationwide basis.

- The HSE is implementing the CIPC (Counselling in Primary Care) programme. This national service was launched in 2013 and is delivering counselling to medical card holders at a primary care level.

The NOSP publishes an Annual Report outlining its activities which is laid before both Houses of the Oireachtas. The Annual Report for 2012 was published on 5 September 2013.

The NOSP has been reviewing its current activities to make the most of our available resources, including looking at best practice internationally to inform evidence-based policy decisions. The review will result in a new Framework which will build on work already undertaken under *Reach Out*. Its aim will be to support population health approaches and interventions that will assist in reducing the loss of life through suicide. This renewed focus will provide for improved coordination and integration of services to ensure that pathways of care for persons at risk of suicide or in suicidal crisis can be accessible, acceptable and available.

Hospital Waiting Lists

217. **Deputy Patrick Nulty** asked the Minister for Health the action he is taking to curb the growing numbers of persons on hospital waiting lists which have increased to 58,649 by August of this year when the number of persons waiting for gastrointestinal endoscopies is included; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44023/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): Significant progress has been made on waiting times since July 2011, when the Special Delivery Unit (SDU) was established to tackle access to acute hospital services. The figures referred to in the Deputy's question concern August of this year. The overall waiting list growth trend experienced from January to July is now reversed in the August figures. There has been a 2% reduction in the total number of patients waiting for admission in August over July, and a 6% reduction in those waiting over 12 months.

For 2013, the target is that no adult should wait longer than eight months for an inpatient or daycase procedure. The number of those waiting over 8 months has reduced by 23% since August 2011. The SDU together with the NTPF and the HSE is now engaged in a national intervention strategy to work towards the 2013 maximum wait times. This involves working closely with hospitals to analyse performance, to agree action plans and extra support as necessary and to ensure hospital capacity is being optimised. All hospitals have now developed and commenced necessary action plans to achieve the national target of having no patients waiting longer than 8 months by the end of this year. Improving access to hospital services is a priority

in the Programme for Government and we are committed to reaching the maximum wait times set for this year.

Hospital Consultants Contract Issues

218. **Deputy Patrick Nulty** asked the Minister for Health the action he is taking to ensure that consultants stick to the terms of their contracts by working a maximum of 20% and in a few cases 30% in private practice; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44024/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): A central objective of the consultant contract is to improve access for public patients to public hospital services. The contract sets out clear rules on the mix of public-private practice that may be undertaken by consultants and measures to manage these rules by appointed clinical directors.

These include a total prohibition on consultants undertaking private practice (Type A contract holders) and a cap of 20% of private activity for newly appointed consultants (Type B) and a cap of up to 30% in the case of certain existing consultants.

The HSE has put a monitoring system in place to report on public/private activity as provided for in the contract and to inform any necessary follow-up actions in individual cases. Therefore I have referred the question to the Executive, who will respond directly to the Deputy in this regard.

Ambulance Service Provision

219. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the reason an ambulance ran out of fuel while transferring a patient from Cork to Dublin for an urgent lung transplant (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44032/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): On 19 September this year, an ambulance broke down near Dublin while transferring a patient from Cork for a transplant procedure. The patient, who was ambulant, completed the transfer in a second vehicle and successfully received the planned treatment.

The cause of the breakdown has been identified as a lack of fuel. The National Ambulance Service has commenced a full investigation of the incident, involving local management and HR in line with normal operating policy and procedures.

In view of patient and third party confidentiality, it is not proposed to comment further on the details of this incident, other than to state that any potential delay arising from the incident had no adverse clinical effect on the recipient or the outcome of the procedure.

Mental Health Services Provision

220. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health his views on research (details supplied) regarding mental health; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44033/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): As Minister with responsibility for Mental Health, I fully appreciate the need to prioritise child and adolescent mental health services.

In 2012 and 2013, additional funding totalling €70 million was made available for the continued development of our mental health services. This is being used primarily to further strengthen community mental health teams for adults, children, older persons and mental health intellectual disability. Just over 890 posts were approved for this purpose. Of these, 150 posts from the 2012 funding, and 80 posts from the 2013 funding, were specifically targeted at enhancing Child and Adolescent Community Mental Health Teams. Despite delays in recruitment until 2013, as of 30 September 2013, the recruitment process was completed for approximately 110 of the 150 posts for Child and Adolescent Community Mental Health Team's in 2013 and a further 5 posts have accepted. As of the same date, approximately 30 posts have been accepted from the 80 posts provided from the 2012 additional allocation.

A significant proportion of the funding initiative announced in the recent Budget will also be directed at improving mental health for the young and on further enhanced suicide prevention measures, details will be outlined in the HSE National Service Plan for 2014.

In addition to HSE direct provision for Child and Adolescent Mental Health services, the Executive also funds various non-statutory agencies and significant work is being done, for example, by organisations such as *Jigsaw* through the *See Change* and *Make a Ripple* campaigns. These campaigns are aimed at overcoming the negative perception of mental health issues among young people.

Tackling the issue of bullying in schools is also a key objective of the Government. A new Action Plan on Bullying was launched last January by my colleagues the Minister for Education and Skills, and the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, to help prevent bullying at both primary and secondary levels. In addition, the National Office for Suicide Prevention in partnership with the Department of Education and Skills has developed national guidelines on Mental Health and Suicide Prevention for the post primary school sector.

The Government is committed in progressing mental health well-being for young people, in line with evolving priorities and overall resources. In this context, research in this area is taken into account by the Department of Health and the HSE as appropriate in relation to advancing policies and service development.

Treatment Abroad Scheme

221. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) in Dublin 9 was refused access to the Health Service Executive treatment abroad scheme although they cannot access the necessary treatment here. [44035/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible.

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

Hospital Services

222. **Deputy Seán Ó Feargháil** asked the Minister for Health the reason a family whose

child underwent a variety of tests at a hospital (details supplied) in County Meath have not yet received results of those tests, if he will arrange for the results to be provided as soon as possible; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44040/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): I have been advised that the child in question became symptomatic on 20 August 2013 and was admitted to Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda on 22 August 2013 and diagnosed positive with *E. Coli* 0157. The child was later transferred to Temple St Hospital and has since made a complete recovery.

As part of the HSE investigation, the child's family was asked about the food it had consumed in the period prior to the onset of illness. A local food outlet was identified as the only place in which the family had eaten away from home. The outlet was inspected by the Environmental Health Service (EHS) of the HSE, which took 5 samples of food for microbiological analysis. The samples were submitted to the Public Health Laboratory on 2 September. The final laboratory reports for these samples were received on 12 September and all samples tested negative or absent for *E. Coli* and VT producing *E. Coli*.

The EHS also arranged for a water sample to be taken from the family home. This was submitted to the same laboratory on 19 September 2013. The final laboratory report was received on 25 September and the water tested negative for the presence of *E. Coli*

I understand that the HSE is making contact with the family to advise them of the test results.

Question No. 223 answered with Question No. 197.

Health Services Provision

224. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding a gluten free diet in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Meath. [44048/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Appointment Status

225. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite a hospital appointment in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44051/13]

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 consul-

tant 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.

Local Drugs Task Forces Remit

226. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the Dublin 12 Local Drug Task Force cannot sustain any further cuts to its budgets in view of the devastating impact the previous cuts have had on local services, equating to 25% since 2008, €350,608 and that future cuts will jeopardise the remaining projects. [44061/13]

227. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health in view of the fact that the Dublin 12 Local Drug Task Force, similar to other Drugs Task Forces have been given the remit for alcohol in addition to drugs, the additional funding that has been given to carry out that task; and if the Health Service Executive diverted its previous spend on alcohol related projects to the taskforces to allow them carry out their new remit. [44062/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): I propose to take Questions Nos. 226 and 227 together.

The Deputy will be aware that I announced a series of measures arising from a review of Drugs Task Forces last December. These measures provide for the extension of the remit of the Task Forces to include alcohol addiction. However, as measures to address the abuse of alcohol remain under consideration by Government, I am not yet in a position to provide clear timescales for the implementation of these measures.

No decisions have been taken yet in relation to the allocations to Drugs Task Forces for 2014. The matter is currently under consideration. It is anticipated that Drugs Task Forces will be informed of their allocations later in the year.

Departmental Bodies

228. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health when the Drugs Advisory Group last met; the agenda and outcome of the meeting. [44063/13]

229. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health when the National Coordination Committee on Drugs met; and its role and remit. [44064/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): I propose to take Questions Nos. 228 and 229 together.

The Deputy will be aware that I announced details of a series of measures last December arising from a review of Drugs Task Forces in order to better equip them to respond to the current pattern of substance misuse. These measures included the extension of the remit of the Task Forces to include alcohol addiction and the establishment of a National Coordinating Committee for Drug and Alcohol Task Forces. This new committee will replace the Drugs Advisory Group. As measures to address the abuse of alcohol remain under consideration by the Government, the National Coordinating Committee has not met, and I am not yet in a position to provide clear time-scales for its establishment. Broadly speaking, the committee will drive implementation of the strategies on substance misuse at local and regional level and will oversee, monitor and support the work of the Task Forces.

The Drugs Advisory Group last met on 16th January 2013, and its agenda is outlined as follows:

1. Minutes and matters arising
2. Review of Drugs Task Forces and the Structures of the National Drugs Strategy
3. Release of 2013 funding to Drugs Task Force projects
4. Liaison/C&V Sector Feedback – significant issues
5. A.O.B./Date of Next Meeting.

It was agreed that if a further meeting of the Drugs Advisory Group was necessary, the Department would contact members.

Health Services Staff Recruitment

230. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if he is going to appoint a consultant specialist in the north east to reduce the delay in consultation appointments for assessment for acute minimum surgery for ear, nose and throat operations; if it is correct that patients may wait for up to four years to see a consultant specialist; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44077/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): In relation to the specific queries raised by the Deputy, as these are service matters they have been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Question No. 231 answered with Question No. 197.

Universal Health Insurance Provision

232. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding free general practitioner care to all children under five years of age; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44084/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): The Government is committed to introducing, on a phased basis, a universal GP service without fees within its term of office, as set out in the Programme for Government and the Future Health strategy framework. As announced in the Budget, it has been decided to commence the roll-out of a universal GP service by providing all children aged 5 and under with access to a GP service without fees. This will mean that almost half of the population will have access to GP services without fees. The Government is providing new, additional funding of €37 million to meet the cost of this measure.

The introduction of a universal GP service constitutes a fundamental element in the Government's health reform programme. The current Government is the first in the history of the State to have committed itself to implementing a universal GP service for the entire population. A well functioning health system should provide equal access to healthcare for its patients on the basis of health needs, rather than ability to pay. The principles of universality and equity of access mean that all residents in Ireland should be entitled to access a GP services that is free at the point of use.

There has been no change in the policy by which eligibility for a medical card is assessed.

Medical cards are provided to people who are, in the opinion of the Health Service Executive (HSE), unable without undue hardship to arrange GP services for themselves and their dependants. Assessment for a medical card is determined primarily by reference to the means, including the income and reasonable expenditure, of the applicant and his or her partner and dependants. There is also provision for discretion by the HSE to grant a card in cases of “undue hardship” where the income guidelines are exceeded. Such cases are decided by a qualified Medical Officer. Medical expenses are taken into account when assessing an application on hardship grounds.

Taxi Regulations

233. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will make available a clear, plain English list of new demerits and fixed charges now in place following the passing of the Taxi Regulation Bill 2012. [43926/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Alan Kelly): The Taxi Regulation Bill 2012, as passed by the Houses of the Oireachtas, sets out clearly the offences under the Bill which are fixed payment offences and which are demerit offences.

Fixed payment offences are specified under Section 48 in the Bill and demerit offences are prescribed under Section 34 in the Bill. In addition, Section 35 in the Bill contains a table which shows the breakdown in the number of demerits that can be applied either upon payment of a fixed charge or payment in respect of a demerit offence or upon conviction of a demerit offence.

Bus Éireann Services

234. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding Bus Éireann transport for an area (details supplied) in County Wicklow; if Bus Éireann will provide transport to this area as this is an isolated rural village in south Wicklow with no transport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43954/13]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The provision of services is a matter for Bus Éireann in conjunction with the National Transport Authority (NTA) and I have forwarded the Deputy’s question to the company for direct reply. Will the Deputy please advise my private office if he does not receive a reply within ten working days.

Roadworthiness Testing

235. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on the attached (details supplied) regarding certificates for commercial vehicles; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44086/13]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): It is a legal obligation throughout the EU for commercial vehicles owners to have their vehicles tested annually. Historically, Irish Road Traffic legislation made it an offence to use a commercial vehicle in a public place without a Certificate of Roadworthiness (CRW). Under the Road Safety Authority (Commercial Vehicle Roadworthiness) Act 2012 a person guilty of such an offence is liable on summary conviction to a class A fine or imprisonment for a term not exceeding 3 months, or to both.

Heretofore, rates of annual testing compliance have been unacceptable. The RSA is implementing important changes to improve the roadworthiness standard of commercial vehicles which will in turn improve safety on our road network. Vehicles that are off the road can deteriorate, therefore it is important that they be tested. For example, tyres and brake hoses may perish, while brake lines, brake reservoirs/air tanks, brake chambers and callipers may seize and or corrode.

As part of the Commercial Vehicle Roadworthiness Reform Programme, the issuing of CRWs is now aligned to the obligation to have commercial vehicles tested annually. Longer delays in completing tests result in shorter periods of validity for issued CRWs. Operators who fail to comply with the requirements for testing should not be allowed to gain an advantage over those who are proactively compliant. Where a vehicle is out of test for over a year, the validity of a CRW is six months from the test date with a further test being required at the expiry date of the relevant CRW.